

THE SUFI AND THE FRIAR



A Mystical Encounter of Two Men of God in the Abode of Islam



MINLIB DALLH

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Cover Art: “Munajat” of ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, Library of Congress 1-87-154.91, Image courtesy of the Mamma Haidara Commemorative Library.

Published by State University of New York Press, Albany

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Printed in the United States of America

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For information, contact State University of New York Press, Albany, NY

www.sunypress.edu

Production, Diane Ganeles

Marketing, Kate R. Seburyamo

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dallh, Minlib, 1968– author.

Title: The Sufi and the Friar : a mystical encounter of two men of God in the abode of Islam / Minlib Dallh.

Description: Albany : State University of New York Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016041359 (print) | LCCN 2017027495 (ebook) | ISBN 9781438466194 (ebook) | ISBN 9781438466170 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Beaurecueil, Serge de, 1917–2005. | Islam—Influence. | Anṣārī al-Harawīal, ’Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, 1006–1089. | Dār al-Islām.

Classification: LCC BX4705.B26515 (ebook) | LCC BX4705.B26515 D35 2017 (print) | DDC 261.2/7—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016041359>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To the memory of three unparalleled Dominican friars:

William C. Cenker
(died on August 8, 2003)

Shigeto Oshida
(died on November 6, 2003)

James D. Campbell
(died on February 11, 2004)

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Acknowledgments

This book would have never seen the light of the day were it not for the invaluable help of many people. I am grateful to them all.

Allow me to thank Bruce Schultz, OP and Catherine (Taffy) Field for their careful reading and insightful observations which helped me refine my thinking and avoid embarrassing mistakes.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude to my mentors and advisors whose support and guidance sustained me throughout my graduate studies at Hartford Seminary and the University of Exeter (UK): Yahya Michot, Sajjad Rizvi, Mahmoud Ayoub, David Burrell, C.S.C. and Ian Netton.

Note on Transliteration and Style

In general, Arabic words are rendered with complete diacritical marks. However, Islamic terms commonly used in English, such as Allah or Islam, follow the Oxford Dictionary transliteration, with neither over-bars nor under-dots.

The Arabic letter ‘ayn is represented by an open single quote (‘), while the closing single mark (’) denotes the *hamza* consonant.

Dates are given in CE (the common era), but in some instances, such as direct quotations, both AH/CE format are given (AH corresponds to the Islamic Hijra calendar).

Introduction

“Are there locks upon our hearts?” Are we adequately susceptible, in our thinking and our relationships, to the content and inward force of the non-Christian other? In particular, do we erect the abiding and unmistakable uniqueness of Christ—into an un-Christlike and therefore un-Christian inattention and depreciation? Because Christianity is by definition “good news,” it would seem fair to say that there must be a capacity for hospitality in its custodians. We are the servants of the faith with a universal invitation. Surely its openness to discovery by men (and women) requires an openness to all men (and women) on the part of us, its servants. The whole Christian relation in this generation to the renascent faiths and ardently self-responsible nations must be one of the fullest and wisest hospitality of mind to their heritage and their hopes. For are not we ourselves the guests of God in Christ?¹

This book investigates the spiritual or mystical encounter of a French Dominican friar, Serge de L. de Beaurecueil (d. 2005),² and an eleventh-century Shaykh, Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt (d. 1089).³ In a world gone religiously awry, this study attempts to show how a Dominican mystic and an erudite scholar of Islam received the gift of the Muslim other. De Beaurecueil was one of the most significant Catholic scholars of the mystical traditions of Islam (Sufism). Undoubtedly he was the foremost expert of the life and work attributed to ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, an eleventh-

century Sufi. As a founding member of the IDEO⁴ (the Dominican Institute of Orientale studies in Cairo), his scholarship was the fruit of a lifelong conversation with Anṣārī’s works. His spiritual journey was an attempt to take seriously Kenneth Cragg’s challenge to Christians, “Are there locks upon our hearts? Are we adequately susceptible, in our thinking and our relationships, to the content and inward force of the non-Christian other?”⁵

Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī was a confrontational and influential Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī who wrote seminal spiritual treatises in both Persian and Arabic. It suffices to note that although the relationship between Ḥanbalīsm (the most conservative school of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam) and Sufism (the mystical dimension of Islam) are often tense and difficult, many a great Sufi master, such as ‘Abd Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), were Ḥanbalī. In his case, Anṣārī remained faithful to a literalist reading of the Qurān and the Sunna (the Islamic tradition based/on the life and words of the prophet and his companions). He adamantly rejected any kind of speculative theology (*kalām*) and the use of reason or personal opinion in religious matters.⁶

Anṣārī lived in the Persian-speaking milieu of Herāt and Khurāsān under the Ghaznavid and the Saljūq Dynasties. This period was intellectually fertile and politically tumultuous. In addition, Anṣārī’s radical dogmatism and his adamant defense of Ḥanbalīsm did not go unnoticed. Like many Ḥanbalī, he was accused of anthropomorphism and ridiculed and persecuted by his adversaries.

De Beaurecueil lived most of his Christian discipleship as a guest in the abode of Islam (*dār al-Islam*). From 1946 to his death in 2005, he spent seventeen years in Cairo and twenty in Afghanistan in direct contact with Muslims. Surprisingly, it was in Afghanistan, the homeland of Anṣārī, that this French Dominican experienced a mystical conversion. His unique path reads like the diary of a Frenchman running away from the Catholic aristocratic milieu in Paris. Such an obsession of a twentieth-century Dominican friar for an eleventh-century Afghani Sufi is above all a transformative encounter of a Christian and a Muslim.⁷

This Dominican life given to the study of mystical Islam is the heart of this book.⁸ First and foremost, this book is an attempt to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of de Beaurecueil’s contribution to Christian-Muslim relations and a study of his life as a testimony to the

varied heritage of Dominican spirituality.⁹ This scholarly investigation is at once genuinely sympathetic and candidly critical and thus contributes to the larger narrative of the Order of Preachers' engagement with Islam and the Muslim world. For the most part, de Beaurecueil's works have not received due attention.¹⁰ All in all, this book fills a lacuna in the literature devoted to mystical approaches to Christian-Muslim dialogue, but it also seeks to reach beyond students and scholars of the mystical approach to Christian-Muslim relations. Readers from various Christian communities and people of no faith at all will find de Beaurecueil's experience in the abode of Islam a compelling argument for dialogue between religions, cultures, and civilizations.

Hence, the focus of this book is, first, de Beaurecueil's scholarship on the life and works attributed to his master-teacher, Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, also known as the Pīr-of Herāt or Pīr-e ṭarīqat; second, his experience of hospitality given to and received from the religious other; and, third, his practical spirituality or *praxis mystica*. This third aspect is the thrust and culmination of his mystical conversation with and study of Anṣārī's works. Ultimately, this study seeks to investigate the transformative role of Islam and Muslims on de Beaurecueil's orthopraxis (correct action) and religious worldview. The present writer is not particularly concerned with orthodoxy (correct belief) because the life of a Christian in the abode of Islam is less defined by theology than by how the person lives his Christian discipleship daily. Orthodoxy, nevertheless, is not neglected because this study addresses questions such as “How did the friar's encounter with Anṣārī enrich his theological perspectives and nurture his Christian-Catholic imagination?”

I. The Abode of Islam (dār al Islam)

In the limited circle of French Catholic scholarship of Islam, but equally relevant to a larger context of *Christian lives given to the study of Islam*¹¹ (to borrow the title of a recent volume), de Beaurecueil's mystical legacy might be considered a reversal of Christian “fulfillment theory,” or *praeparatio evangelica*. This theory holds that all non-Christian religions were “preparations for the Gospel” before the Christ event and have become obsolete after the event and henceforth deprived of any positive

role in the salvation of their members.¹² Contrary to the theory of *praeparatio evangelica* theory, de Beaurecueil's Christian discipleship yielded its best promises in *dār al Islam*. His Christian background became a fruitful ground where Islamic virtues of hospitality and attentiveness to the religious other took roots. Hence, Islam and the Muslim world were neither a means to Christian martyrdom/sainthood nor an occasion for Catholic rhetoric or rationalization for canonization. Conversely, the abode of Islam serves as one of the most fecund locations where Christian triumphalism and exclusivism along with various forms of theological and political arrogance are challenged and “evangelized.”¹³

By and large, Christians do not reflect sufficiently on the import of Islam or how Islam keeps Christianity honest and true to its core claims.¹⁴ It seems that a persistent feeling of supersessionism (the belief that Christianity supersedes every other religion) prevents many Christian scholars of Islam from fully appreciating the “Muslim other” theologically and politically. The untold and often underrated story in many studies of Christian-Muslim encounters is the role that Islam plays in bringing to fruition Christian ideals.¹⁵

No doubt, de Beaurecueil’s life testifies to the issues at the heart of Christian-Muslim encounters, that is, not only a complex history¹⁶ but also radical theological incompatibilities. The Dominican friar Georges Anawati, who was the leading figure at IDEO, asks, “Where do we locate Islam in Christian salvation history?”¹⁷ It is a baffling question to all Christian scholars of Islam. Louis Massignon (d. 1962), one the most influential French scholars of mystical Islam, considers the matter in a more complex and delicate manner: “Do I need to remind you of the mystery of Islam and the intractable questions it raises to Christian consciousness when one tries to probe God’s providential aim for it?”¹⁸ These questions, and others with issues such as the authenticity of the prophethood of Muhammad or the revealed nature of the Qurān, remain genuinely contentious grounds between both traditions.¹⁹

To state matters clearly, my argument does not, first, ignore Islam’s grandeur (i.e., the formidable richness and contribution of Islamic civilization to humanity) or its misery (i.e., the many failures of Muslim communities in history). Second, the author does not forget the many important criticisms of Islamic tradition both within and without. Third, I

do not engage in a deliberate antihero rhetoric. Rather, this study puts the focus on the often forgotten or belittled role that Muslims play in “evangelizing” Christian scholars who take Islam seriously. Most works on Christian scholars of Islam, and particularly Catholic religious men and women, are not primarily concerned with the role of Islam. For example, in books penned in honor of René Guénon (d. 1951), Louis Massignon (d. 1962), Henri Corbin (d. 1978), Pierre Claverie (d. 1996), and the like, the literature is dominated by a Christian worldview. Even Western authors unconcerned with religious supersessionism have produced works that are dominated by a secular European mind-set.²⁰

To return to de Beaurecueil, no scholar of Islamic mystical traditions in any Western language has devoted more than half a century of his or her entire scholarship to the Pīr of Herāt. At times, a secondary source opens unexpected windows onto a primary source and allows a better interpretation and grasp of a historical figure, and in this sense, de Beaurecueil’s erudite work is an invaluable secondary source and a fine hermeneutic of the corpus attributed to Anṣārī. Robert Caspar calls de Beaurecueil’s work “a scientific monograph with theological perspectives.”²¹

However, de Beaurecueil’s mystical hermeneutic does not pretend to understand the master’s work better than he understood Anṣārī’s corpus or himself, and thereby offer a perennial interpretation that is timeless. Rather, de Beaurecueil’s scholarship, legacy, and contribution fall squarely within the vast and complex field of classical Islamic mysticism and particularly in the tradition of Catholic studies of Islam.²² The French Dominican friar’s lifelong theological and mystical conversation with Anṣārī’s work offers a stellar example of an orthopraxis (correct action/activity) of dialogue.²³ This mystical path combines the following aspects: first, a master-disciple relationship exemplified by Louis Massignon’s study of the famous Baghdadi Sufi Maṇṣūr al-Ḥallāj’s (d. 922) work; second, the ethical dimension of Christian discipleship as a necessary component of interfaith dialogue; and third, an attempt to emulate the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth before his public ministry.²⁴ For de Beaurecueil, the ethical dimension of his mystical conversation with Anṣārī compelled him to abandon his position as a professor at the University of Kabul to attend to Kabul street children by opening a house of hospitality called *La Maison*

d'Abraham. In so doing, the French Dominican friar gives us a magnificent and luminous meditation not only on the hidden and abiding presence of God but also on the *aporia* of the religious other. The friar's life shows that the non-Christian other remains an inevitable difficulty, puzzlement, and at times a radical contradiction to Christian salvation history.

II. The Religious Other in the Postmodern World

How can “the context of otherness” reveal the possibility of God?²⁵ Interfaith dialogue in our postmodern, fragmented, and pluralist world lays bare the question of how the whole project of religious discourse and practices are to be pursued in an all-pervasive “context of otherness. There have been many attempts to rethink a theology of interfaith dialogue in a world of manifest ambiguities and ever-new complexities. The history of religions seems to defy and resist all attempts of reducing them to a common denominator. Our modern and postmodern situations fit well Theodor Adorno’s metaphors of “force-field” and “constellation” (the latter one borrowed from Walter Benjamin). In his book *Adorno*, Martin Jay defines the two metaphors:

“[T]he force-field” (*Kraftfeld*) [is] a relational interplay of attractions and aversions that constituted the dynamic, transmutational structure of a complex phenomenon ... “constellation” [signifies] a juxtaposed rather than an integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principles.²⁶

In both cases, Jay points to a fragmented world where the common denominator is elusive, and grand integrative narratives have vanished. Faith traditions in our world today falls also squarely within Adorno’s examination of “social phenomena.” Jay writes, “In examining cultural and social phenomena, Adorno often used both metaphors to capture the subtle relations between and among their subjective and objective, particular and universal, historical and natural dimensions.”²⁷ Interfaith interactions in a globalized world are a combination of estrangement and familiarity, reconciliation and aversion. A cursory study of the religions of the world

confirms Adorno's intuition to a large extent. But the fragmentation of the world is not foreign to religious traditions plagued with internal strife and at times deadly theological divisions. Richard Bernstein, who utilizes both metaphors in his writing on modernity and postmodernity, agrees with Adorno but takes the matter further. He captures best the complexity of our postmodern world:

There are always unexpected contingent ruptures and radical instabilities that disrupt and break the project of reconciliation. The changing elements of the new constellation resist such reduction. What is “new” about this constellation is the growing awareness of the depth of radical instabilities. We have to learn to think and act in the “in between” interstices of forced reconciliations and radical dispersion.²⁸

His observation questions many circles in the interfaith world that are enmeshed in various attempts to simplify and reduce radical incompatibilities to common features. Bernstein speaks of “instability and dispersion,” and Adorno sees “force-field and constellation.” In this “field-force” or “constellation” environment, a theology of dialogue raises crucial questions about subjectivity, otherness, and “relationality.” The challenge to most people engaged in interfaith dialogue is how to remain faithfully rooted in their own religious tradition and yet become open to and respectful of those committed to very different and sometimes incompatible beliefs and values. It seems that the harmony of a wider and multifaith world can only be promoted by maintaining the integrity and fragility of each partner in the relationship.²⁹ As Bernstein notes accurately, there is no “final reconciliation—an *Aufhebung*—in which all difference, otherness, opposition and contradiction are reconciled.”³⁰ What is true for our world is particularly true for faith traditions in the context of otherness. They feel an increased sense of deep instabilities and radical dispersion. The mystical approach, however, embodied in de Beaurecueil’s hermeneutic of Anṣārī’s work seems equipped to live with instability, lack of reconciliation, and dispersions. Mystical traditions are often attuned to paradox and unsettling theological transmutations.

Equally relevant to de Beaurecueil’s experience is Michael Barnes’s pertinent insight in his book *Theology and Dialogue of Religions*. He notes

that interfaith dialogue is “the negotiation of the middle.” He explains further his position: “I do not mean by this some sort of haggling or bargaining over positions of power but, more profoundly, a mediation of the context of otherness.”³¹ As a Dominican friar invested in the study of mystical Islam in Cairo or in Kabul, de Beaurecueil was constantly attuned to the context of otherness. As we will see later, every encounter in the abode of Islam for him was “a negotiation of the middle.” Even more correctly, Barnes understands that this “middle” is always broken and always mended, constantly unstable.³² The negotiation of the middle, Barnes concludes astutely, “is to recognize that all Christians [as well as other believers] speak out of a dimension of irreducible otherness which they encounter at the very heart of their own identity, the ‘middle’ of a world shared with [the] other.”³³ This study would agree with Barnes that interfaith dialogue has to negotiate the “middle” but also seeks to “give a theological account of practices of welcome and hospitality towards the other.”³⁴ For de Beaurecueil, the negotiation of the middle was a practice of hospitality toward the non-Christian other. Even better, according to the former archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, interfaith dialogue is a theology of “learning about learning.”³⁵ Williams sees a dire need to let the other, the religious other, teach us something alien and even disturbing about our own theological framework.

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil’s theological imagination has to clothe itself in what the Cambridge theologian Timothy J. Winter terms a “transcendentally-ordained tolerance”³⁶ or what Khaled Abou el-Fadl, professor of Islamic law, aptly calls the “imperative of a collective enterprise of goodness.”³⁷ This kind of hospitality and forbearance is not a superficial sentimental longing for peaceful coexistence with the religious other or with those from whom we differ theologically. Such a sacred hospitality is “deeply rooted in a mutual recognition of, and respect for, the holiness that lies at the core of different faith and wisdom traditions, and all revealed religions.”³⁸ This study embraces this kind of mystical perspective on religious dialogue because of its capacity to navigate intractable dispersion and instabilities. This is not a recipe for mutual agreement over tea and nice conversation or a Christian-centered salvation problematic Karl Rahner points to our most sinister temptation when he cautions, “How are we to ensure that the absolute optimism of Christianity does not become the

naive optimism which turns all human religiosity into some generalized revelation of the divine?”³⁹ Rahner insists on the particularity of each faith tradition without adhering to a position that seems to seal the end of dialogue and cannot adequately capture the open, porous, and dynamic features of religious identity.⁴⁰ Aware of the dangers of shallow conversations and intrinsic instabilities, the mystical perspective on dialogue seeks to preserve the freedom and integrity of each party, be it within or without a particular religious tradition. This perspective scrutinizes what happens to the identity of Christian theologians and/or mystics when they encounter the other by crossing the threshold into another world. This insight also gives an account of the vulnerability of the self in the face of the religious other and touches on the whole epistemological question of how mystics convey what happens in the imagination before the terrain of logical and conceptual expression of the mystical experience. Also, how does one name or evoke this mystical apprehension that evolve sequentially as vulnerability, openness, and finally conviction?

The concern for the otherness of the religious other is essential to this research because the other is legitimately dissimilar, strange, and unfamiliar. As Barnes puts it, “[H]ow can anyone claim to know the other as other, let alone speak on behalf of the other?”⁴¹ The non-Christian other, for example, remains an outsider to be a conversation partner and a location for understanding. R. Bernstein helps us grasp fully the essential requirements for such understanding. He writes, “[T]he basic condition for all understanding requires one to test and risk one’s convictions and prejudgments in and through an encounter with what is radically ‘other’ and alien.”⁴² Thus, de Beaurecueil’s scholarship on Anṣārī’s thought and life is a genuine encounter with “what is radically other and alien” on the most difficult ground, religious beliefs, and traditions. This Dominican friar born into a Catholic aristocratic milieu in Paris and educated in the Thomistic tradition entered in conversation with the work of a Ḥanbalī Sufi of Herat. It was a transformative journey that led to a serious contemplation on the meaning of one’s commitment to a particular religious tradition.

De Beaurecueil’s life journey was an attempt to craft a theology of religious pluralism that “imagines the possibility of harmonious difference and peace as the inner dynamic of the triune God,”⁴³ to borrow Gerard

Loughlin's beautiful line. The French Dominican friar learned to recognize and appreciate otherness within and without and to develop a nuanced and complex understanding of otherness, a sensitivity, and an openness to the exterior religious other. Therefore, he had to move from a mere philosophical and theological perception to a deep mystical imagination of the other. This mystical imagination tried to avoid dogmatic, fanatical, and irrational views. His life was an attempt to allow Islam to nurture a Christian prophetic imagination and a faithful Dominican life.

The goal of a mystical imagination is to envision and foster a new ethical and religious horizon of “understanding the other in his or her strongest light,” to borrow Bernstein’s phrase.⁴⁴ For David Tracy, a Roman Catholic theologian, “[t]he praxis of interreligious dialogue itself … does not merely bear a ‘religious dimension.’ It is a religious experience.”⁴⁵ Tracy sees the very presence of the divine in people’s endeavors to enter in conversation with the religious other. This practice of hospitality to the other is an encounter and an invitation to meet God and experience the gift and challenge of otherness. Fortunately, encountering the other is often not only a fertile ground for our hermeneutical sensitivity but also an opportunity to expand our theological perspectives and curtail our indifference and ignorance.

Therefore, a mystical perspective on religious dialogue is a “theology which takes seriously the Christian [or other faith traditions’] responsibility of hospitality to the stranger, the responsibility of narrating a story which neither totalises nor relativises [the other].”⁴⁶

This study offers an embryonic methodology and a theology of dialogue that could serve contemporary Catholic Christians in relation to the religious other, especially at a time when the hopes and enthusiasm of Vatican II reforms that encouraged greater dialogue with Islam seem to have run out of steam. The mystical perspective on religious dialogue allows Christians to remain faithfully rooted in their Christian vision of a time-honored truth and permits others whose truth claims are different and maybe incompatible to be neighbors in the biblical sense. Neither side should need to dilute or minimize their beliefs when faced with differences. In de Beaurecueil’s case, from 1946 to his death in 2005, Islam as a religion, a civilization, and a polity—and particularly the mystical dimensions of Islam—informed and shaped his Dominican life. De Beaurecueil’s theological and political positions were the fruit of the

encounter of Islam and Christianity on the one hand, and a blending of Western European, Arabic, and Persian worlds, on the other.

This study keeps track of de Beaurecueil's unique contribution to interfaith dialogue. His is a genuine encounter with the religious other and a guest who welcomes his host. As Derrida puts it, "*L'hôte comme host est un guest.*"⁴⁷ Derrida refers to a kind of hospitality where the guest becomes the host and vice versa. The French Dominican Claude Geffré is correct when he notes that we must think about religious diversity as the theological paradigm of our time.⁴⁸ In de Beaurecueil's case, he tries to understand Islamic civilization from within and to experience its holy hospitality. It seems that such a task demands what Jules Monchanin terms "a monumental patience (*une patience géologique*)."⁴⁹ It is the kind of patience that Rainer Maria Rilke refers to in his *Letters to a Young Poet*:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will find them gradually, without noticing it, and live along some distant day into the answer.⁴⁹

Such monumental patience signifies that no one has the final say on the divine providence according to which men and women follow different faith traditions with sincerity and authenticity and thus believe in different paths of salvation. One of the most seasoned veterans of religious dialogue, Mahmoud Ayoub, reminds us that the Qur'ān cautions against arrogance and presumption of righteousness. The text rejects overconfidence (or the arrogant boasting) on matters that belong to God alone, such as people's ultimate destiny in the hereafter. Ayoub writes:

the Qur'ān categorically condemns the arrogant boasting by any of the followers of al three monotheistic religions of the superiority of their faith over that of the two other communities. It states, "It is not in accordance with your [Muslims'] wishes, nor the wishes of the people of the Book; rather whoever does evil, s/he will be recompensed for it, nor will s/he find any friend or

helper against God. And anyone who performs righteous deeds—male and female—and is a person of faith, those will enter the garden [of paradise] and they will not be wronged in the least. (Q.4:123–24).” Thus we see that the criterion for acceptance with God is neither religious identity nor class or gender but faith and good deeds.⁵⁰

Ayoub’s position is well known among progressive thinkers across the board and has the advantage of reminding believers that humility and confidence in God’s judgment and providence are the hallmarks of submission (*aslama*) to God. In his book *Islam and the Faith of Others*, Mohammad Hassan Khalil offers a masterful assessment of one of the most controversial and consequential questions in Islam: can non-Muslims be saved? His insight brings Ayoub’s caution to an arresting conclusion: “the ethos of the Qur’an and Sunna compels a hermeneutic leap of mercy, then the end result is a positive ambiguity, the kind of ambiguity that leaves believers with a deep sense of humility and hope for humanity.”⁵¹

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil’s biography problematizes the hopes of Christians and Muslims and dramatizes their struggle to see each other as genuine and authentic believers. There is no place for romanticism and/or bigotry in this encounter. There are obstinate and incompatible faith claims that need to be reckoned with at the most fundamental levels. But one of the goals of theology is a persistent attempt to square circles and faithfully account for the limit of human endeavor in fully understanding “God’s self-communication to humanity,” to borrow from Karl Rahner. This book is also the author’s own journey to tease out the theological acumen of otherness, particularly the religious other and what it really means to be a theologian on the edge, constantly defining oneself vis-à-vis the larger community. In addition, the personalities and unique characters of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil have deeply influenced my own theological imagination. They were two deeply religious men endowed with special qualities. This study is a spiritual journey toward the heart of a Ḥanbalī Ṣufi through the life journey of an exceptional Dominican friar. The mystical dimensions of both faith traditions provide a plausible road map to hospitality.

It is beyond the scope of this book to give a thorough and systematic analysis of the mystical traditions of Islam and Christianity. This study

nonetheless focuses on aspects of Christian and Islamic mysticism directly relevant to Anṣārī’s and de Beaurecueil’s milieus. Both mystics lived ordinary lives with ups and downs, and their lives are witness to what it means to take seriously one’s own faith tradition. Our interest lies in the mystical tradition of the eleventh-century Khurāsān and particularly the spirituality of a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī.

The mystical legacies of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil seem critical of institutional religions and centers of power. In this case, although Margaret Smith’s conception of mysticism is disputable, it is nonetheless useful for our purpose. She writes, “Mysticism [has] its rise in a revolt of the soul, in those who [are] really spiritually minded, against formality in religion and also indifference to religion.”⁵² Also, de Beaurecueil would agree that all human language about God, in terms of doctrines, dogmas, and creeds, is by definition inadequate. T. S. Eliot describes it as “shabby equipment always deteriorating.”⁵³ Eliot was concerned with the limitation and inadequacy of poetic language, but mystics were and are concerned with the inadequacy of all human language and images about God. Eliot wrote:

Trying to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure ...
... And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate.⁵⁴

Finally, in terms of mystical and intellectual lineages within the field of Islamic studies, de Beaurecueil is closer to the path of the seminal and revolutionary spiritual heritage of Massignon and to the ministry of hospitality and presence among Muslims of Charles de Foucauld and Pierre Claverie (d. 1996) than to the traditionalist or perennialist school of René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and the like.⁵⁵ To be certain, both lineages have played an influential role in redefining the nature of religions and the meaning of religious diversity. These two intellectual lineages are complementary in their contribution to a wider and deeper understanding of the philosophical, mystical, and spiritual dimensions of Islam.⁵⁶

This study uses the insights of comparative mystical theologies of Islam and Christianity. In addition, a historical approach helps account for

the lives, spiritual milieu, and intellectual biographies of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil. What major events shaped their mystical paths? Who fostered and nurtured their mystical quest and yearning? It is crucial to uncover, on the one hand, the disparities between Anṣārī’s and de Beaurecueil’s human journeys and, on the other, the similarities of their spiritual quests. The differences between them in terms of geography and history are important to an understanding of their spiritual paths. This study opens a window into how de Beaurecueil read and treated Anṣārī’s work as a path of conversion.

There are four chapters. The first two chapters are biographical in nature. In [Chapter 1](#), de Beaurecueil’s biography is established on the basis of published and archival material at the IDEO in Cairo, St. Jacques’s Priory in Paris, the Angelicum in Rome, and Lycée Esteqlāl in Kabul. I follow the trajectory of de Beaurecueil’s life curve: his studies at Le Saulchoir, first involvement with Islam, and relationship with the IFAO (Institut Français d’Archeologie Oriental) in Cairo. Finally, the chapter touches on the establishment of the IDEO.

[Chapter 2](#) delves into Anṣārī’s life and historical milieu. His life story and unique personality are, in my view, the key reasons that compelled de Beaurecueil to dedicate a lifetime career to the Pīr-of Herāt and later to take up residence in Kabul from 1963 to 1983. Also, the author locates, on the one hand, the Pīr of Herāt within the Khurāsānian Ṣūfī masters, examining his Ḥanbalī spirituality, and, on the other, pays attention to the political and theological upheavals of eleventh-century Khurāsān. Who were his influential teachers? This biography examines his belligerent temper, outright hatred of speculative theology, and experience of prison and exile. Anṣārī’s biography is an important building block in understanding de Beaurecueil’s attraction to the Pīr of Herāt, and a necessary tool for interpreting his entire mystical thinking.

[Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) examine de Beaurecueil’s intellectual and spiritual path. Chapter 3, “[de Beaurecueil: A Premier Scholar of Anṣārī](#),” serves as a springboard for the next chapter. It explores de Beaurecueil’s annotations, translations, and commentaries on the spiritual treatises attributed to the Pīr of Herāt. Two treatises regarding the stages of the spiritual path are under consideration: *Kitāb ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Fields) and *Kitāb manāzil al-sā ‘īrin* (The Stages of the Wayfarers). Anṣārī’s most popular and beloved collection of intimate conversations with God, the *Munājāt*, concludes the

chapter.⁵⁷ On the one hand, de Beaurecueil's erudite scholarship sheds light on the spiritual insights of the eleventh-century Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī master, and on the other, these spiritual treatises inspired de Beaurecueil's Dominican life and mystical quest in the midst of a Muslim community.

In chapter 4, I explore de Beaurecueil's life among Muslims in Afghanistan and the establishment of the *Maison d'Abraham* for Kabul street children. My argument is that by providing hospitality to a group of Kabul's street children who found themselves alien and estranged in their own land, de Beaurecueil experienced what Massignon called "the holy hospitality of Islam." It was in giving hospitality to his host that the guest experienced true hospitality—what I refer to as the Dominican friar's *praxis mystica*.

This book offers a unique and yet limited example of a mystical/spiritual approach to Christian-Muslim relations. De Beaurecueil's spirituality or mystical theology is Catholic and Dominican in scope, dialogical in commitment, intuitive and yet practical in its goals. The French Dominican friar's life among Kabul street children raises fundamental questions about the context of otherness, attentiveness to the non-Christian other, hospitality, fragility, vulnerability, and interruptions. Such an immersion transformed his orthopraxis (correct practice) and "evangelized" his theological and spiritual imagination. Like many Christian vowed religious men and women living among Muslims and dedicated to the study of Islam, de Beaurecueil's life exemplifies friendship, hospitality, and alterity (*alterité*). In this case, the abode of Islam is the ground where Christian and Islamic virtues meet. This mystical perspective on religious dialogue embodied a *praxis mystica* in which the guest becomes the host and the host becomes the guest. The study is skewed with the present author's own sense of otherness, spiritual dispersion, and theological instabilities. Like J. Buttler, I confess, "This, then: my symptom, my error, my hope ..."⁵⁸

Serge de Beaurecueil, OP (1917–2005)

A Life Curve

... of course, your task is not to engage in the conquest of Islam, not even try to convert a few individuals here and there separated from the Muslim community. On the contrary, you must give yourselves utterly to an in-depth study of Islam, its doctrines and civilization. This is a long and abiding apostolate of institutional quality.¹

One of the jewels of Cairo, the city of a thousand minarets, is known as “Islamic Cairo” in the neighborhood of ‘Abbāsiyya. In this part of the city, visitors marvel at Cairo’s Islamic heritage, which is a world of famous gates, medieval forts, shrines, and century-old marketplaces. Above all, the vicinity is filled with Fatimide, Mamluk, and Ottoman mosques; and mausoleums with breathtaking architecture. Another point of reference nearby is the quarter of Gamaliyya, where Naguib Mahfouz (d. 2006) locates the scenes of his major work of fiction. His Nobel Prize-winning novel, *Midaq Alley* (*zuqāq al-midaq*), is set in an alley in Khān al-Khalīlī (a major bazaar) in Islamic Cairo.

Indeed, in this historical district of ‘Abbāsiyya, the Dominican friar, Antonin Jaussen (d. 1962), built an impressive Dominican priory at 1st Maṣnā‘ al-Ṭarābīsh Road, about a mile away from al-Azhar’s Mosque and University. Today the precious jewel of the priory is the library of the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies (IDEO),² named after one of the founding members of the institution, Georges G. Anawati (d. 1994). It is within the walls of this priory and its library that Brother Serge de Laugier

de Beaurecueil would start a unique journey that would lead him to Afghanistan in the footsteps of ‘Abdullah Anṣārī. Correctly, Dominique Avon remarks, “within the vast field of Islamic mysticism, Serge de Beaurecueil cuts a path of astonishing originality.”³

Borrowing from J. J. Pérennès’s book *Passion Kaboul: Le père Serge de Beaurecueil*, this biography studies de Beaurecueil’s family background and focuses on the social and theological backgrounds that influenced his Dominican formation. The chapter is divided into four sections: first, de Beaurecueil’s early life in Paris; second, his Dominican formation at Le Saulchoir; third, the establishment of a Dominican center of study in Cairo; and, last, his scholarly endeavor at the IDEO.

I. A Wounded Privilege

1. Negotiating an Aristocratic Childhood

On August 28, 1917, Serge Emmanuel Marie de Laugier de Beaurecueil was born into an aristocratic family in his maternal grandfather’s house. His birthplace was the luxurious district of Paris (16e arrondissement) at 42, Rue Copernic, the present location of the Lebanese Embassy. His father was le Comte Pierre de Laugier de Beaurecueil, a thirty-three-year-old cavalry officer, away on the battlefields and trenches of World War I at the time of his birth. His mother, Roberte de Quelen, came from a family of wealthy *Drogomans* (interpreters) of the Ottoman Empire who had settled in Istanbul for generations.⁴ De Beaurecueil gives a quick look at his genealogy: “My family formed a surprising genetic melting pot, a mix of Provençal and Brittany, Corsican and Polish, and all from an aristocratic lineage, with a good dash of Jewish blood. My grandmother’s maiden name was Oppenheimer.”⁵

Unfortunately, the privileges of an aristocratic heritage did not guarantee a happy childhood. His parents married in 1914 and divorced in 1931. Three children were born out of this unhappy marriage: Serge, born in 1917; his sister, Antonia, born in 1920; and younger brother, Raoul, born in 1922. Antonia became a hermit in the Benedictine Order in the region of the Drôme, and Raoul a social worker in Paris. Pérennès remarks about Serge’s parents:

The couple was certainly from aristocratic stock but sadly unhappy. They did not get along for multiple reasons: their marriage was arranged as it was often the case in certain circles at the time. Above all, the mother, a very beautiful woman, was capricious, wounded herself by a difficult childhood.⁶

Hence, de Beaurecueil spent most of his childhood and youth with the stigma of a child born into a privileged yet broken family. Catholic aristocratic circles of the time were comfortable, bourgeois, and religiously conservative. Divorce or birth out of wedlock was an anathema. In their case, de Beaurecueil and his siblings paid a tremendous price even though they had nothing to do with their parents' divorce. They could not enjoy a regular childhood where they invited peers to their house or visited others.

At this point, a brief exposé on the relation between de Beaurecueil's childhood misfortune and his later attachment and care for children in dire situations is in order.⁷ The friar's early life was marked by the neglect and absence of his mother, the authoritative and military discipline of his father, and the regime of boarding schools. Even later in life, he recalls, "In a broken family like ours, children must be sent away. Hence, I followed my fate. It was the beginning of a wretched childhood for children born to a divorced couple. Even at the age of seventy five, the memories of this period still burn vividly."⁸ Obviously his childhood woes had a lasting impact on him. Pérennès believes that Serge's childhood story is the key to understanding his entire life and his spontaneous affinity with children in difficult situations.⁹ There are reasons to believe that the divorce of his parents, the stigma he endured, his mother's indifference, and lack of care sparked in him a compassion for the afflicted.

Later in life, he would show a natural disposition, a remarkable tenderness and care for children and youngsters. He seemed to have turned this traumatic childhood experience around. Pérennès remarks, "Born into a divorced family, he has always loved children, maybe trying to give something he never experienced himself."¹⁰ Throughout his life, children's hospitals would remain one of his favorite locations for ministry. However, this view is a little far-fetched. Unlike Serge, his brother, Raoul, and sister, Antonia, who suffered the same fate, did not exhibit such a disproportionate attachment to suffering children. Seldom did Serge himself link his care for

children to his own childhood experience. It is safe to argue that the friar's childhood experience alone fails to explain fully his utter dedication to suffering children in his mature age.

Therefore, the influence of his difficult childhood needs not to be exaggerated but kept in due proportion. Although it is tempting to read too much into these experiences of his early days,¹¹ I believe that his premature choice to join a religious order, his decisive will to go as far as possible from the aristocratic Catholic milieu of Paris, and his utter compassion for suffering children were the result of a web of reasons and circumstances. Understandably, he was reluctant to open the pages of his early life and entertain the memories of his relationship with his mother. Now and then, he would volunteer a few facts about his parents, a grandfather, and an uncle, but astonishingly little about his mother. Later chapters tease out the different aspects of the influence of his childhood on the mature Serge.

At any rate, two words summarize his early childhood: fear and dream. These sentiments fueled an unquenchable desire to go as far as possible from Paris.¹² For certain, the longing to go away stems mainly from a lonely childhood experience. He refers to it as "a wretched childhood." In dreams he found the remedy against fear and loneliness. He hoped for a journey that would take him away from France, from all that his childhood symbolized.¹³ For example, he saw himself as the son of an Indian Rajah in exile and hoping to return home one day.¹⁴ He said to himself, "I had to dream to keep my mind away from family matters and school work."¹⁵ During this ordeal, he found solace in the world of his books as well. His childhood dreams, born out of cultural and religious stigma, would find an echo in his religious zeal for foreign lands and peoples. Here lies, in my view, his deep-seated longing to travel the world and visit remote lands. Egypt and Afghanistan would fulfill such a yearning.

Serge's early childhood traumatic years and his determination to run away explain his impetuous wish to join a religious community. These two factors sowed the seeds of a deep longing, a search for otherness, and a will to go to mission lands. He sought to leave his country, family, and friends and go to unforeseen destinations. His life would be marred by points of departure. No wonder he was mesmerized by the patriarch Abraham, who was called to leave all beyond and trust in God's providence on his journey to unknown destination. It is probable that this earlier experience of

uncertainty and ambiguity would facilitate his encounter with the religious other and later his mystical conversation with Anṣārī’s work. As his life journey unfolds, his entire epistemology and hermeneutic of the religious other took root at Le Saulchoir, continued in Cairo, and blossomed in Kabul.

To return for a moment to his early life, under the care of his grandfather, his early schooling and secondary education took place at the most prestigious and elite schools in Paris. After Saint Croix de Neuilly, he went to l’École de Gerson and then to Lycée de Janson de Sailly where he earned his *Baccalauréat*. Maybe the only laudable aspect of his childhood was the prestigious schools he attended. Early on he developed a fascination for foreign places and languages. At twelve he started learning Russian, and at fourteen he enrolled in Arabic classes at Lycée de Janson de Sailly. He passed his baccalaureate in philosophy with Arabic as a third language.¹⁶ The dream of a future life in a distant land and the desire to stay as far as possible from married life and aristocratic Paris might have opened a window to religious life. He recalled his dream to join a religious community at a tender age:

I dreamed a future far away from all my surroundings, and henceforth my desire to join a religious community. I said to myself: I will never marry because marriage is a recipe for disaster. I would go as far as possible and within my childlike logic, I convinced myself that if Jesus gave his life for me, I must as well give mine for his sake.¹⁷

2. An Unexpected Call to a Life as a Dominican Friar

De Beaurecueil spent some of his holidays in Vaulogé in the region of Sarthe at the castle of his uncle de Carini. In spite of his fear of dark stairways and nocturnal sounds, he paid attention to a painting of John of the Cross¹⁸ holding a jug of water and a dry loaf of bread in his prison cell. The holiness and austere demeanor of John of the Cross deeply impressed the young man; with the naiveté of a teenager, he confesses:

In addition there was *The Life of the Saints*, which I read constantly at my uncle de Carini’s castle on Thursday night after

the Boy Scouts' meetings. John of the Cross, in his prison cell, was in ecstasy, and wearing a frock and a white cloak. He was locked up by his Carmelite brothers, who found him too dangerous and subversive. I decided to be a Carmelite.¹⁹

This spontaneous desire remained a childlike dream but points to a deep-seated search or restlessness. Nevertheless, at the age of thirteen, during a summer vacation at Mer-les-Bains in Normandie, he met a strange person, Père Aquity. This fortunate encounter would change the course of his life and alter his dream to join the Carmelites. De Beaurecueil recounts his meeting with Aquity:

At the young age of thirteen, we went to a summer vacation at Mer-les-Bains in Normandy. It was our introduction to the sea. At our hotel, there was a priest with a long beard, Père Aquity, who was also on vacation, and always ate alone. I will never forget his name. One day, while it was too cold to swim, he invited me to walk to the statue of the Blessed Mother in the hills. On the way, he asked: what would you like to do when you grow up? I will be a Carmelite monk, I replied. Do you know them? He asked. I have never met one but I read about John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, and the ascetic life ... Believe me, the priest said, I lived in the Holy Land for years and met many Carmelites. But, why not think about Dominicans? In Jerusalem, I studied at the École biblique. I think, you would make a good Dominican.²⁰

This advice stayed dormant in his consciousness but not for too long. Upon his return from Mer-les-Bains, de Beaurecueil searched for a Dominican priory in his area. Fortunately he found one at rue Faubourg-Saint Honoré (Couvent de l'Annocation) and took a chance on the priest's advice. He writes:

Père Aquity's remarks stuck in my mind and one day I paid a visit to the Dominican priory at 2 rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. Père Kételaire welcomed me and noted "You came at the right time; I am the syndic of the house." Then, he gave me the tour of the

vicinity from the basement to the attic. I was mesmerized and decided to become a Dominican.²¹

His visit to the Dominican priory and the hospitality of friar Kételair changed his mind. He felt a sharp difference between the atmosphere of his childhood abode and his first impressions of the Dominican priory at rue Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. He remarks:

What hospitality! He [friar Kételair] gave me a complete tour of the priory. Everything pleased me: the white habit, the silence of the cloister, and the impressive painting of Desvallieres entitled “Dominican Apostolate.” Also, the brightness of the building, the chanting at holy hours, and the smile of the brethren in the hallways were unforgettable. What an environment imbued with joy! Goodbye, the Carmelites! Of course Père Aquity, I will become a Dominican.²²

After the enthusiasm of his first visit, de Beaurecueil stayed in touch with the priory, and for four years he kept steady correspondence and regular contacts with the Dominicans at rue Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. In the meantime, his father did not take seriously his son's desire to become a Dominican. He had more suitable careers in mind for him than the life of a Dominican friar. He hoped that the experience would be brief once the youngster discovered the austerity of religious life. However, thanks to friar Périnelle's persuasion, the novice master at the time, Pierre de Beaurecueil did not oppose his son's decision to enter the novitiate. Therefore, on October 14, 1935, de Beaurecueil joined the Dominican province of France and started his novitiate in Amiens. Later he recalled that his father was in the chapel when he received the Dominican habit.²³

Like many an immature young mind, he was very easily persuaded. It did not take much to make him switch from a Carmelite vocation to a Dominican one. It is remarkable, however, that the desire to join a religious community took precedence over other possible careers. The aristocratic environment of his grandfather's and uncle's castles, the emptiness left by his mother's absence and neglect, and his early boarding school life, all provide some explanation for his great interest in religious life. None of these experiences advocates for marriage as the most attractive option in

life. Maybe the aristocratic Catholic milieu also provides a hint as to his early vocation. Religious life in such a milieu was looked upon with great respect, even though his father, Pierre de Beaurecueil, was not amused.

Above all, the young man was searching for a place he could call home. The Carmelites or the Dominicans seemed to offer a way out of a dreadful childhood and lonely bourgeois upbringing. One can speculate on the real meaning of his premature vocation to religious life. He seemed to have made up his mind very early and never looked back. There is almost no trace or hint of regret in his letters and other writings concerning his choice to become a friar as such a young age. His choice might have looked hasty, but he lived his religious life to the fullest and without regret.

Moreover, his choice to become a friar preacher opened the doors to the fulfillment of his childhood dreams. From then on, the possibility of going as far as possible from the Catholic aristocratic milieu of Paris was within reach. In a posthumous tribute to de Beaurecueil, André Velter writes, “Born in Paris in 1917 into a broken family, the youngster dreamt of decisive projects which would take him as far as possible from France, and God heard his prayers.”²⁴ Velter did forecast precisely de Beaurecueil’s lifelong yearning to find in the farthest lands the face of the divine. In his own words, he brings his childhood drama to a hopeful conclusion: “[My] wretched childhood, however, was blessed and indispensable for my experience in Kabul. My childhood was a ‘call’ to leave, to fly away without looking back. I knew this intimately from within the experience of a miserable childhood.”²⁵ He finally found a family in the Order of Preachers and a place where his dreams would become a reality, starting with his formation years at the Dominican studium.

II. Le Saulchoir: A Rebirth of Dominican Scholarship²⁶

1. A Special School of Theology and History

Before probing de Beaurecueil’s scholarly endeavors, we must set the scene by describing the Dominican studium (or seminary) of Le Saulchoir, where de Beaurecueil was educated and formed as a friar preacher. In 1903, the French government of Emile Combes (d. 1921) enforced rigorous policies of a strict separation of Church and State.²⁷ Many religious institutes were expelled from France, and the French Dominicans had to move their

formation house from Flavigny-sur Ozerain (Côte d'Or) to Belgium.²⁸ The Dominicans of the province of France relocated to Le Saulchoir Kain les Tournai. The building was an old monastery abandoned by Cistercian nuns and called Le Saulchoir because of a grove of willows (*saules* in French) at the edge of a pond in the yard. The Dominican studium would remain in Tournai for thirty-five years and return to France in 1939 at Étiolles, a few kilometers from Soisy-sur-Seine. During those years of exile in Belgium and upon its return to France, Le Saulchoir was a hallmark of scholarship and intellectual excellence. Most of the best minds of the Order of Preachers who would influence the Second Vatican Council were alumni of Le Saulchoir.²⁹

At the studium of Le Saulchoir, the Dominican community lived a quasi-monastic life away from city noise and mundane preoccupations. But the friars were deeply aware of “the signs of the times.” Le Saulchoir was at the beginning under the aegis of two great minds: Ambroise Gardeil (d. 1931) and Pierre Mandonnet (d. 1936).³⁰ In the words of Yves Congar (d. 1995), Gardeil was “a thinker of the highest level in theology and determined to raise the quality of the seminary studies (at Le Saulchoir) to a university level.”³¹ His epoch-making book, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, stressed the primacy of the revealed word over tradition. The book opens a path to a dialogue between Thomistic studies and contemporary philosophy. In the words of Chenu, Gardeil’s book was the “breviary of Le Saulchoir’s methodology; in other words, Dominicans found therein the spirit and perspective to guide their own studies and writings.”³² A. Gardeil was Regent of Studies for many years and pioneered a school of theology that would integrate methods borrowed from social sciences into theology and philosophy and be opened to public universities’ curriculum and the larger secular society. Chenu remembered his own early experience at the studium:

By the time I arrived at Le Saulchoir, the studium had found its inspiration, methods, and balance through the gifts of many friars who, although they were living in the church of France which was enmeshed in the modernist crisis, had serenely articulated a theology which combines scientific principles, contemplative richness and apostolic roots.³³

Along with Gardeil, Mandonnet insisted on the historical study of medieval texts, particularly Thomas Aquinas's writings. As a scholar and historian of medieval philosophy, Mandonnet had for decades published a series of studies that placed the writings of Aquinas in their historical and cultural perspectives and provided Le Saulchoir with the methodology of a new orientation. He introduced Chenu and many friars to the historical study of medieval texts.³⁴ Thanks to Mandonnet, an institute of medieval studies was founded at Le Saulchoir in collaboration with Étienne Gilson, who chaired medieval studies at the prestigious university of La Sorbonne. The rise of medieval studies and the application of historical methods to the study of Thomas Aquinas would lead to the foundation of another important center in North America, the medieval institute in Toronto, Canada.³⁵

In 1934, while the studium was still located in Belgium, two Pontifical faculties of theology and philosophy were erected. There were twenty-two professors and about one hundred students, including non-Dominicans. In 1932, Chenu was appointed Regent of Studies (the director of students' study programs and head of the school).³⁶ The biographer of Chenu, Jean Pierre Jossua, is correct in remarking, "In 1932, M. D. Chenu became Regent of Studies, and along with his friends Henri-Marie Féret and Yves Congar, he would give Le Saulchoir an international reputation ... He was a friar gifted with a marvellous human spirit and a spark of genius."³⁷ Chenu's tenure as rector is regarded as the most significant period in the life of the institution.

As noted earlier, in both Kain les Tournai and Étiolles, Le Saulchoir hosted remarkable friars, including erudite and prolific theologians Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges,³⁸ Antoine Dondaine, Gerard des Lauriers, Louis-Joseph Lebret, and Yves Congar; biblical scholars Roland de Vaux and Pierre Benoit; liturgists Pierre Marie Gy and Irenée Dalmas; and pastoral and moral theologians Albert Plé, Pierre Liégé, and Pie Régamey. Famous Dominicans from other provinces, including Edward Schillebeeckx (a Dutchman born in Belgium), Fergus Kerr, and Timothy Radcliffe (both from Blackfriars in England), also were educated at Le Saulchoir. These friars worked intensely, and those years were extremely productive.³⁹ A case in point is that, in 1907, they published the epoch-making the *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*.⁴⁰ The reputation of this scholarly journal remains intact to this day.

The Dominican friars at Le Saulchoir were doing for theology and philosophy what Marie Joseph Lagrange (d. 1938) was doing for scriptural studies. At a time when ecclesiastical training was for the most part accomplished by using theology manuals—second- and thirdhand accounts of the scriptures, the fathers, the councils of the church, and the great schools of theology—Le Saulchoir’s friars argued for theological formation that used primary sources and embraced Gardeil’s and Mandonnet’s critical methodologies in every branch of ecclesial studies. The friars called for the absolute necessity of integrating historical criticism and scientific rigor in all aspects of Catholic theology. The modernist crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century and historical criticism had shattered the Catholic *weltanschauung* and disoriented the advocates of *philosophia perennis*. Chenu summarizes the situation:

After a long brooding period, the historical and philosophical foundations of the Catholic faith were on the brink of collapse; and thus, the entire edifice of religious studies, from practical knowledge to scholastic theology, from biblical studies to ecclesiology were unraveling.⁴¹

Fully aware of the crisis, Chenu not only insisted on historical criticism and engagement with modernity, but also called on the Dominican friars of France to take seriously the study of other religions.⁴² His first intuition as a medievalist was the influence of Muslim and Arab philosophy on Latin medieval philosophy and theology, particularly Thomism. Chenu raised fundamental questions about the nature of Catholic theology in terms of its methodology and pedagogy, particularly with regard to seminaries and Pontifical schools. He tried to rethink theology’s fundamental relationship with history on the one hand and faith on the other. Chenu was a wellspring of daring ideas and had the intelligence to forecast necessary theological and ecclesial turns. Christopher F. Potworowski believes that “[i]t would be very difficult to write an accurate history of Catholicism in the 20th century without granting a pivotal role to the contributions of the French theologian M. D. Chenu.”⁴³

Indeed, the year he was appointed rector (1937) of Le Saulchoir, Chenu wrote a little pamphlet destined to shake the ground of Catholic seminary education. He questioned the entire structure of Dominican friars’

initial formation in his *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. Claude Geffré calls it “Chenu’s small programmatic book (*son petit livre-programme*).”⁴⁴ He sought to articulate a vision for Le Saulchoir and its theological, philosophical, and pastoral programs, which were faithful to Gardeil’s and Mandonnet’s visions. Paul Philibert, in a book he coauthored with Thomas O’Meara, summarizes the content of this remarkable book: “In this small book … [Chenu points to] the school’s fidelity and to the genius of Lacordaire and Gardeil. He spoke of the spirit and method of its philosophical and theological teaching. Finally, he gave an appendix listing the publications of the members of the school.”⁴⁵ Also, in an interview with Jacques Duquenes, *Un théologien en liberté*, Chenu recounts himself the circumstances of the book’s inception:

This book started as an improvised short pamphlet. Indeed, it was customary to deliver a lecture on the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. In fact, it was a good occasion to take stock of our deep motivations. I did so as the Rector of Le Saulchoir in a short address. My paper impressed students and faculty alike and they took notes and decided to publish it. After all, the first draft was improvised, so I decided to rewrite the entire paper and further clarify my views on the historical critical method in theological studies.⁴⁶

It was not only Catholic theology and its neo-Thomistic approaches that were in dire need of rethinking. Chenu saw clearly that:

The intelligibility of the mystery of faith has to be understood in its historical context and sacred history. Of course, such a position challenges the concept of “perennial theology” which freezes theological thought in time and space. Here, theology is dragged into relativism, or in other words, into the complex game of relations which modify not the substance of faith, but its historical expressions.⁴⁷

One can hardly overestimate the influence of Chenu and Le Saulchoir on de Beaurecueil. This period of formation was crucial for him and for the entire community at Le Saulchoir. Like others, he had to rethink the

Catholic approach to history, philosophy, hermeneutics, and other faith traditions. He had to place the entire work of Thomas Aquinas and its influence in the context of thirteenth-century medieval Europe and take seriously the influence of Islamic civilization on the Latin West. In other words, historical situations and circumstances, the limitations of theological formulations, and dissent in theological matters were part of a theologian's worldview and epistemology. He questioned the pertinence of neo-Thomism and neo-scholasticism, which had dominated Catholic theological imagination for centuries. The three confrères Anawati, Jomier, and de Beaurecueil would carry these radical approaches to Catholic studies learned at Le Saulchoir, which would influence their own research of Islamic studies, with them.

Under Chenu's aegis, de Beaurecueil learned to cut against the grain, to listen to the movement of the Spirit, and to be bold in his choices. Unfortunately, Chenu's revolutionary view did not fare too well in Catholic circles, particularly in Rome.⁴⁸ Concerning Roman authorities, Philibert notes, "in general, they mistrusted the use of history in theology and considered it a risk destined to lead to relativism by abandoning a timeless *philosophia perennis*."⁴⁹ In 1942, Chenu was silenced and forbidden to teach and publish. His book was banned by Rome and put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* by Pope Pius XII.⁵⁰

However, history has its way of vindicating forerunners. Indeed, twenty years later, the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65, under Pope John XXIII, started an *aggiornamento* (or updating of the Church). During the council the Catholic Church's theology toward other faith traditions would change drastically. Chenu's solid theological understanding, erudite historical insights, intuition, and remarkable creativity cost him dearly but also resulted in fruitful new departures that have remained classical resources for contemporary theology, particularly for the French Dominican order's engagement with the Arab and Muslim world.

Chenu and his teaching team insisted that theologians must keep their eyes on the signs of the times by discerning possible "seeds of the Word" or the inchoate reality of the reign of God, as Vatican II sees Christian vocation. Anawati, Jomier, and de Beaurecueil all were the fruits of Chenu's intelligent and prophetic foresight.⁵¹ Jean Pierre Jossua summed up Chenu's life in these words: "His fundamental optimism and communicative genius made him an incomparable brother and teacher. The

French Dominicans owe to him the splendid vitality of this period of their lives, and so does the Catholic Church even more, although she has ever been willing to acknowledge it.”⁵² In a nutshell, Chenu revitalized the tradition of Dominican formation and scholarship. With regard to de Beaurecueil, he energized Dominican engagement with the Muslim world.

2. Summoned to Islamic Studies by M. D. Chenu

De Beaurecueil was nineteen when he arrived at Le Saulchoir de Kain Les Tournai in 1936. He had already started learning Arabic at Lycée de Janson de Sailly in Paris, a move that would serve him well later on. After a year of novitiate in Amiens (northern France), he started his study in Catholic theology and philosophy along with his senior brothers Jomier and Anawati. As noted earlier, Chenu would have a decisive role in the direction their lives would take. It was at Le Saulchoir and under Chenu’s persistent call that the Dominican investment in the Arab and Muslim world would take a providential turn. They were groomed for a serious study of Islam and Muslim societies. Chenu wanted them to study Islam as a religion, a civilization, and a polity in order to correct long-standing historical misconceptions about Muslims. At the time, the wave of *la nouvelle théologie* and the Catholic *ressourcement* movement deeply questioned Catholic theology and its triumphalist and arrogant views of other faith traditions.

At Le Saulchoir, de Beaurecueil became the third member of a core team designated for Islamic studies. Chenu protected the trio against any attempts to assign Jomier, Anawati, and de Beaurecueil to a different task. Many times he would intervene to cancel assignations with regard to them.⁵³ At the studium and during four years of intense study in the Dominican tradition, de Beaurecueil achieved a deeper understanding of his Dominican calling. Theology and philosophy at Le Saulchoir were taught in the context of a renewed understanding of Thomism. In addition to classical courses in Catholic and Thomistic tradition, Chenu introduced the trio to Massignon and encouraged them to attend his lectures at the Collège de France. Regis Morelon, the former director of the IDEO, reports Massignon’s first visit to the Dominican studium at Le Saulchoir de Kain Les Tournai:

An interesting event! L. Massignon, professor of Arab civilization at the Collège de France, during a visit at Louvain University for a conference, called from Brussels to ask for a meeting at Le Saulchoir between 1h30 and 2h30 in the afternoon. Father Syave, who knew him well, welcomed him kindly, and we all gathered to visit with him. On Father Mandonnet's prompting, Massignon came to see how Latin medieval scholars (that we were) could collaborate with Arabist medieval scholars for the study of the relations between Arab and Latin philosophies of the XIII century.⁵⁴

This occasion was a sign of a solid rapprochement between this outstanding Orientalist and the Dominicans of France. Massignon would remain a close friend of the Dominicans and a frequent guest at the IDEO in Cairo. Later he would be instrumental in helping de Beaurecueil embark on the study of mystical Islam.

Sadly, in 1939, the Second World War broke out, and de Beaurecueil had to interrupt his studies. He was called to military service and sent to the city of Jounieh in Lebanon. At the time, Lebanon was a French protectorate. Throughout his entire stay, he hoped to practice Arabic and encounter Lebanese. Unfortunately, he missed the opportunity because of the dire military restrictions. His first experience in a predominantly Muslim country was a disappointment. He remarked, "Nothing is more detrimental to one's desire to know a people and its land than the life of a soldier living in a barracks for marines. All relations were lost because of the uniform."⁵⁵ This missed opportunity did not, however, crush his desire for a scientific investigation of Islam and Muslim civilization.

De Beaurecueil stayed in Jounieh for eight months; then he was sent back to France. Upon his return, he spent two months in Mont-Clergeon, near Rumilly, in Haute-Savoie, where he volunteered to work with young people in a program called *Les jeunes des chantiers de jeunesse*.⁵⁶ In June 1940, he was discharged from military duties and reentered Le Saulchoir at l'Étiolle to complete his studies. Toward the end of his theological studies, and mostly building on his missed opportunity in Lebanon, de Beaurecueil enrolled at *l'École nationale des langues orientales* in Paris to continue his studies of Arabic. It was there that he furthered his relationship with Massignon. The latter would have a decisive influence on de Beaurecueil in

terms of what Chenu called “Islam as a vocation (*L’Islam comme vocation*).”

In so many ways, Massignon’s honest, generous, and at times controversial views of mystical Islam sank deep into de Beaurecueil’s consciousness.⁵⁷ As a result, he read and studied Anṣārī, like Massignon’s study of the famous Baghdad mystic al-Hallāj. Although there was a communion of thought in terms of epistemology and hermeneutics between the two Orientalists, de Beaurecueil and Massignon did differ.⁵⁸ Massignon was an exceptional Orientalist but not a theologian. Avon is correct in noting that de Beaurecueil departed to a certain degree from both Massignon’s Ḥallājism and L. Gardet’s neo-Thomism. He notes:

At the beginning I enjoyed Gardet’s articles. Later on, however, I distanced myself as I did for Massignon. I did not care for Gardet’s neo-thomism, particularly, his distinction between natural and supernatural mysticism. Also, I did not like the tendency (in Massignon’s case) to make al-Hallāj the towering figure of mystical Islam.⁵⁹

In 1943 de Beaurecueil completed his theological studies at Le Saulchoir with the equivalent of a doctorate in theology⁶⁰ and earned a licentiate in Arabic literature from *l’École nationale des langues orientales*.⁶¹ The same year, he was ordained as a priest in the Order of Preachers by Cardinal Suhard of Paris.⁶² By that time, Anawati and Jomier were already in Cairo at the IDEO. This project of a Dominican study center, launched in 1938 by both the Dominican Order and the Vatican, could finally be implemented. Anawati, Jomier, de Beaurecueil, and Jacques Dominique Boilot are often considered the founding members of the institute. Their endeavor is in the lineage of the French Dominican province’s involvement with the Arab and Muslim worlds, but it also fits the larger context of the Order of Preachers’ history with Islam. Indeed, the IDEO is the *terminus ad quem* of the history of Dominican erudition in Islamic studies.

Anawati, Jomier, and de Beaurecueil formed an unusual trio in terms of personalities, destinies, and talents. Even though these friars shared bourgeois and upper-class upbringings, they were very different in

temperament. Avon speaks of “diverse founding members (*une équipe foundatrice bigarrée*).”⁶³ Their success remains a historical achievement. For decades, these friars (with the help of countless others) managed to make Dominican scholarship on Islam and Muslim civilization one of the best in Catholic traditions. As noted, the IDEO was built on the original idea of Marie Joseph Lagrange (d. 1938), the handiwork of Antonin Jaussen (d. 1962), and the adamant belief of Chenu (d. 1990) in the signs of the times.⁶⁴

III. The French Dominican Friars in Cairo

1. The Vision of Biblical Scholar M. J. Lagrange

A brief history of the IDEO is in order at this point. The foundation of the Dominican house in Cairo was first the dream of Lagrange. At the *École biblique*,⁶⁵ Lagrange directed his students to investigate the entire land of the Bible scientifically in terms of exegesis, Semitic languages, history, geography, epigraphy, and archeology. He added study travels to various sites mentioned in the biblical narratives. According to Lagrange, “the bible should be read in relation to the land in which it was written, and studied in the physical and cultural context that gave it birth.”⁶⁶

Lagrange had the extraordinary talent of spotting genius in young Dominicans friars. Within a decade, he selected and formed the first generation of astonishingly talented young Dominicans in biblical studies. The most important were Antonin Jaussen, a specialist of Arab ethnography;⁶⁷ Louis-Hugues Vincent (d. 1960), considered the father of Palestinian archeology; Antoine Raphaël Savignac (d. 1951), an excellent Semitic epigraphist; Félix-Marie Abel (d. 1953), a scholar whose erudition and keen critical sense resulted in an incomparable mastery of the history and geography of Palestine; and Edouard-Paul Dhorme (d. 1966), an Assyriologist and the first to decipher Ugaritic.⁶⁸

In Lagrange’s foresight and vision, Cairo, Egypt, was a natural destination where students of biblical studies could be initiated into archeology and Egyptology. Almost a century after Napoleon Bonaparte’s expedition to Egypt (1798–1801), the French had established in 1898 the IFAO,⁶⁹ which would be an undeniable support to the Dominican biblical

scholars in terms of Egyptology and the archeology of Ancient Egypt. As a seasoned scholar, Lagrange understood the historical and cultural importance of Cairo. He wrote:

The great interest of this institute is that Cairo is the intellectual heart of Sunni Islam and the location of important European study centers. There is a considerable interest in establishing an institution of high education for young Catholic religious which could help prepare Muslim intellectuals for an unforeseeable future, and impress upon them a respect for secular sciences, attract oriental Christians and finally anchor Latin Catholics in their faith. ... If I am so adamant about such a school, it is due to my global vision for the *École biblique*, which must take priority at the beginning. However, there is clear advantage to start slowly and avoid undue publicity.⁷⁰

Hence, he sought to build a kind of pied à terre (an adjunct house) in the service of the *École biblique*. He insisted:

It would be honorable for the Catholic Church to have in Cairo an institute for the study of Christianity in Egyptian, without mentioning Egyptology and Arabic studies. Cairo is by far the most important intellectual center for Islam, and it has an important center of Egyptology. The Catholic Church must be represented by a center of such studies.⁷¹

In 1911 Lagrange officially proposed to the Dominican province of France, gathered at Le Saulchoir de Kain, the project of establishing a house in Cairo, which would include an institute of study (Egyptology in connection with biblical studies) and a little apostolic team to support pastorally and spiritually the small Latin community of Cairo.⁷² The city of Cairo seemed a natural choice because it is the location of one of the most prestigious Sunni universities, Al-Azhar University, which forms and educates Muslim religious leaders and scholars from Indonesia to Senegal. Unfortunately, Lagrange's idea ran into a number of complications mainly because of the difficulties of finding a consensus between the Holy See, the Dominican headquarters in Santa Sabina (Rome), St. Étienne's Priory in Jerusalem, and

the province of France. Luckily, Jaussen, from the province of Lyon, would bring Lagrange's hope to fruition.

2. A. Jaussen: The Builder of a Dominican Institute

As noted earlier, Jaussen was a professor at the *École biblique* of Jerusalem, where he taught Oriental archeology, ethnography, Arabic, and Sabean script. He spent a great deal of his study in anthropological research among the Bedouins of the region. From 1895 to 1925, Jaussen and A. R. Savignac (d. 1951) traveled through the region to document the people's way of life. Jaussen was one of the first Western scholars to delve into Arab and Middle Eastern anthropology. His *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab et Coutumes palestiniennes-Naplouse et son district* and a three-volume book titled *Mission archéologique en Arabie (mars-mai 1907)* are classics in the field of Arab Bedouin ethnography and anthropology.⁷³ During World War I, he traveled all around the Middle East working for the French and British alike.

Jaussen settled in Egypt in 1928. Until 1932, he lived alone and worked tirelessly to raise money to build the Dominican house in Cairo. In 1931, thanks to his relationship with Egypt's King Fuad (d. 1936), he bought a piece of property at half-price in the name of the *École biblique* in 'Abbāsiyya. According to the contract signed with the Egyptian authorities, the Dominican house was affiliated to St. Etienne in Jerusalem, and its sole purpose and vocation would be strictly scientific.⁷⁴ Clearly, no proselytism would be allowed; otherwise they would lose their property. By 1935 the main part of the building was completed. As Morelon explains, "As put forth by father Jaussen, the purpose of this institute is faithful in its principles to father Lagrange's intentions during his first visit, but the goal is now much more ambitious."⁷⁵ However, Lagrange's dream took a long time to come to completion.

With regard to the foundation of the IDEO, Lagrange conceived the idea, Jaussen built the priory, Chenu imagined the decisive turn, and Anawati led the first crew on the ground. The friar who held things together between Jaussen and Anawati was Marie Dominique Boulanger (d. 1961). He was the first to be assigned to Cairo and arrived in 1932. He would take over after Jaussen moved to Alexandria, where he settled permanently in 1937 until his return to France for health reasons in 1959.⁷⁶

In Cairo, Boulanger and another newcomer, Anselme-Bertrand Carrière (d. 1957), would devote themselves to the pastoral care of the French Catholics of the Latin rite and the Dominican Third Order founded by friar Martin Rousseau (d. 1940) in 1910.⁷⁷ Boulanger and Carrière maintained the Dominican presence until the decisive turn initiated by Chenu in 1938. Meanwhile, Boulanger took great care of the priory and in 1933 founded the “Thomist Circle” of Cairo. The Circle was an intellectual, cultural, and religious forum and a veritable formation place for the French-speaking community associated with the Dominicans.

Jaussen, Lagrange, and other members of the *École biblique* visited often to give conferences.⁷⁸ In 1934, the Circle printed its first bimonthly journal, “*Cahiers du Cercle Thomiste*.⁷⁹ The *Cahiers* were the printed versions of the conferences given by Dominican friars and lay scholars who were members of the Third Order. Unfortunately, the original goal of the institution—Egyptology related to biblical studies—seemed to have been forgotten. Also, in terms of Islamic studies, there was no resident scholar yet. Jaussen nonetheless had sown the seeds of a solid network that would greatly benefit the friars later. Morelon remarks:

Finally, one must add that the intellectual reputation of father Jaussen and the web of relations he established in Egypt were very valuable to the first three members of the institute from its inception in 1944. This network allowed the founding members of the IDEO to acquire good and credible reputation very early on.⁸⁰

Since 1932 and under the leadership of Boulanger, the Dominican priory in Cairo has been a functioning institution. But, the decisive turn in terms of its destiny (i.e., Islamic studies) took place in the academic year 1937–1938 at the studium of Le Saulchoir d’Etiolles, thousands of miles away from Cairo. Chenu, dean of the studium,⁸¹ groomed three student brothers for a scientific study of Islam and its civilization. This initiative almost coincided with the request of the French Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (d. 1972), secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental churches, request on behalf of the Vatican. Tisserant invited the Dominican Order to initiate a

committee to consider a scientific engagement with Islam and the Muslim world.

Unlike Chenu, Cardinal Tisserant's first intuitions were to support the Oriental Christian minority. First he met with the Missionaries of Africa (the White Fathers) in Tunis, where they had established a study center (IBLA: *Institut des belles-lettres arabes*),⁸² and then the Dominicans. Cardinal Tisserant had been a student of J. M. Lagrange at the *École biblique* and had a real connection to the Order. He asked Martin-Stanislas Gillet (d. 1951), the Master of the Order at the time, to envision a Dominican mission in predominantly Muslim lands. In response, Gillet sent Chenu on a tour in Jerusalem, Cairo, Tunis and Algiers, where the Dominicans had priories and houses. Chenu did not reinvent the wheel of Dominican Orientalism, but he gave this endeavor a decisive turn.

For Chenu, the time had come to bring his vision to fruition. He has always believed that a proper understanding of medieval European thought, particularly Thomistic philosophy and theology, needed a good knowledge of its sources, Islamic and Arabic philosophy. According to Chenu, European medieval thought is

largely unintelligible if it is not connected to its Arab and Muslim sources in which it takes its roots, and draws its fundamental structure and vitality with regard to philosophy as well as other sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.⁸³

The necessity for Dominicans to open a center of Islamic studies had never been so urgent in Chenu's eyes. He writes:

Therefore it is necessary to study Islam seriously and directly from its original sources and not rely upon questionable translations barely faithful to primary material. Muslim scholars would have no respect for you unless you are capable of reading and discussing primary text in the original Arabic language. ... And of course, without a hint of proselytizing.⁸⁴

The question of proselytizing is extremely important and could derail the whole project. It is understandable that even Cardinal Tisserant agreed wholeheartedly with Chenu:

This endeavor is not a direct attempt to establish an apostolate which would be not only useless but objectively uncalled for. There is a serious project ahead: to know Islam, its history, doctrines, civilization, sources, and to do so through in-depth and prolonged studies which require the dedication of a life time of a scholar.⁸⁵

Even though there were a lingering colonial sentiment and missionary impetus in both Cardinal Tisserant and Gillet, the Master of the Order,⁸⁶ Chenu would push vigorously for the idea of Islamic studies for its own sake, away from missionary conquest and zeal. Fortunately for Chenu and the Dominicans, they had a young Arab Christian, Anawati. He was brilliant, eager to learn, and hardworking.⁸⁷ However, it would take a few more years for the Dominicans to have a team on the ground in Cairo. Nonetheless, the vision of a new approach to Islamic studies within the Catholic Church, particularly for Dominicans, was under way. Hence, the prophetic and almost providential turn at Le Saulchoir with Chenu broke the mold in the history of Dominican Orientalism. This history concludes with the foundation of the IDEO in Cairo, where de Beaurecueil started his Orientalist journey.⁸⁸

IV. At the IDEO

1. The Choice of Abdullah Anṣārī

Very early, as Pérennès notes, de Beaurecueil showed a keen independent spirit and a gift for languages. He writes, “The third member of the crew, Serge de Beaurecueil, was a strong personality as well.”⁸⁹ Upon arrival in Cairo, however, de Beaurecueil did not have a solid background in Islamic studies, particularly in Islamic mysticism. At Le Saulchoir, he delved into Catholic Thomistic theology. Avon agrees: “Until his arrival in Egypt, the Dominican friar [de Beaurecueil] was mostly busy with his classical theological studies in the Dominican tradition. He did not take introductory courses in mystical Islam either at Le Saulchoir or at any other University.”⁹⁰

Thus, once in Cairo, de Beaurecueil had to find a field of research in Islam. His confrère Anawati opted for classical Islamic philosophy, and his other confrère Jomier chose contemporary Islamic thought and modern Qur'ānic commentaries as a field of scholarship. De Beaurecueil decided on the mystical dimensions of Islam.⁹¹ However, how did he embark on the study of the life and work of ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt? Tradition⁹² has it among the Dominican friars in Cairo that Anawati prompted de Beaurecueil to have a conversation with Osman Ismā‘īl Yahyā (d. 1997).⁹³ Yahyā at the time was a student at the University of al-Azhar and later would become one of the leading scholars of Ibn ‘Arabī. He was a regular reader at the library of the IDEO and a close friend of the Dominican friars. According to J. M. Mérigoux, Yahyā told de Beaurecueil, “Who am I to counsel you about Sufi masters? I can just say this much: by far two Ṣūfī masters have influenced me most: Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) and ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt (d. 1089).”⁹⁴

De Beaurecueil took Yahyā’s advice seriously and consulted Massignon, who wrote back, “Do not hesitate. Anṣārī is crucial to mystical Islam and no one has seriously studied his work. A few years ago, I spent a night long prayer vigil at his tomb in Herat.”⁹⁵ In addition, an Iraqi Jesuit, Paul Nwyia (d. 1980), was already working on Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh with a remarkable expertise.⁹⁶ De Beaurecueil said to himself, “It would have been unwise to tread the same path ... I settled for Anṣārī.”⁹⁷ This episode lends itself to a popular Chinese saying, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

De Beaurecueil engaged his studies with such zeal and discipline that he would rapidly overcome his prior lack of knowledge in Islamic mysticism. In addition, the environment of the IDEO mirrored the lifestyle of the Dominicans at Le Saulchoir. The rigorous intellectual discipline and the expertise of his early teachers were decisive. He also had to learn Persian to fully engage his studies. Fortunately, fate was on his side. A year after his arrival, Cyprian Rice (d. 1966),⁹⁸ an English Dominican, arrived at the IDEO. He was an excellent Persian scholar and became de Beaurecueil’s teacher. Pérennès recalls:

In 1947, a British Dominican Cyprian Rice (1889–1966) joined the community in Cairo. He was, however, a little older than the rest of the friars and much more attuned to Iranian studies than Arabic. He could have been an asset to the nascent priory because he was trained at Cambridge University and had an excellent command of Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Unfortunately, he was assigned to Cairo without prior consultation [with him] and more interested in Shi'ism than Sunni Islam. Thus, Rice did not fit into a francophone milieu invested in the Arab world. He would leave the community three years later. During his short stay, nonetheless, his contribution to the burgeoning community was important with regard to Persian studies and mysticism. He was de Beaurecueil's first Persian teacher.⁹⁹

During the following years, de Beaurecueil worked hard to acquire the tools he needed to excel in his research, namely, fluency in the needed languages for Islamic scholarship and the techniques of editing ancient manuscripts.

2. The Studious Years of a Burgeoning Orientalist

For seventeen years at the IDEO, de Beaurecueil edited, translated, and commented on Anṣārī's spiritual treatises (mainly) and but also on other mystical works. While in Cairo, he worked intensively and mastered Persian with such ease that his confrère Anawati was happily surprised. However, he faced two important hurdles; on the one hand, Cairo's Muslim intellectual circles were not interested in Islamic mysticism, and on the other, he had to learn how to edit ancient manuscripts. Concerning the former issue, he befriended Yaḥyā al-Khachab, professor of Persian studies at the University of Cairo, who fortunately was interested in Persian Ṣūfīsm. Providence came through with regard to the latter problem. Professor Pierre Nautin (d. 1997),¹⁰⁰ one of the best patristic scholars, stayed at the IDEO while working on the manuscripts of Didymus the Blind (d. c. 398), the great Alexandrian theologian of the early church. Under the tutelage of Nautin, de Beaurecueil learned the techniques of editing ancient manuscripts. Hours spent on this painstaking job finally paid off. Avon summarizes the daunting task facing de Beaurecueil's early years at the IDEO:

[He] has to start from scratch because at the time, mystical Islamic had no currency in Cairo's intellectual circles, maybe at the exception of professor Yahya al-Khachab, who taught Persian literature at the University of Cairo. For the most part, de Beaurecueil was busy editing, translating, and commenting on various mystical treatises. Luckily, one of the visitors of the Dominican priory, Professor Pierre Nautin, a historian of the early church, came to do research on Didymus the Blind (d. c. 398). Professor Nautin gave de Beaurecueil a precious gift. He taught him the techniques of editing ancient manuscripts. Nautin's teachings were instrumental to the friar's successful task of untangling the complex web of manuscripts of Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī's *Stages of the Wayfarers*. His edition and translation of this treatise is considered the best in any western language.¹⁰¹

Like many other friars at the IDEO, de Beaurecueil joined with Anawati and Jomier in building relationships with Egyptian intellectuals, religious and secular scholars alike. In their search for partners for dialogue and conversation, Anawati was the key figure. De Beaurecueil lived through the ups and downs of the IDEO. He took an active part in *Le Circle Thomiste* and “*l'Association des frères sincères, (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā)*” and the famous meetings titled *Les Mardis de Dār al-Salām*.¹⁰² These forums were occasions of Christian-Muslim encounters. He delivered papers on Anṣārī at these meetings. The lectures at these gatherings were geared toward philosophical, theological, and spiritual discussions, initiated by Massignon and Mary Kahil (d. 1979).¹⁰³

Indeed, *Les Mardis de Dār al-Salām* were unique experiences where Christian Catholics and Orthodox, Muslim, and secular intellectuals met to discuss societal and religious issues, comparative religions, and matters related to spirituality. It was, as Pérennès put it, “the creation of a space for dialogue with Muslims” (*l'invention d'un espace pour le dialogue avec les musulmans*).¹⁰⁴ The friars befriended many important Egyptian scholars, such as Taha Hussein, Youssef Karam, Mahmoud al-Khodeiry, Yahyā al-Khachab, Naguib Mahfouz, and many more. Also, Anawati reached out to the scholars of al-Azhar and crafted a working relationship between the IDEO and the most famous Sunni University in the world. In such an

environment, de Beaurecueil lived the most rigorous and yet rewarding time of his formation as a scholar of mystical Islam.

Nevertheless, these years of hard work and commitment to Islamic mystical dimensions went through periods of difficulties as well. As Avon correctly notes, “The endeavor was tedious” (*La mise en route est laborieuse*).¹⁰⁵ During the period of 1946 to 1950, de Beaurecueil experienced at times some frustration with the community and also fatigue due to the rigorous and painstaking scientific research on tedious Sufi texts. Consumed by a thorny environment, he neglected his scholarly work and dedicated much of his energy to pastoral activities. In a letter to Father Avril, a close friend and his provincial at the time, he explained his disappointment:

At the moment, I am not particularly involved with my work as an orientalist. I do not feel connected to Egypt and it would make no difference if I were in Paris or Peking. ... In Cairo, very few are interested in mystical Islam and many look at Sufism as a strange product of antiquity, while others fall into the despicable spectacle of Sufi orders' popular piety.¹⁰⁶

During these periods of lack of interest in research, he held a few others' pastoral positions: first as a chaplain at the Christian Brothers' high school located in the popular and impoverished quarter of Khurunfish, where he celebrated the liturgy in the Coptic rite. He also devoted part of his time to Catholic Boy Scouts of Wadi al-Nil, located in the same vicinity. Finally, he worked as a chaplain to inner-city factory workers.¹⁰⁷ His choices show an affinity for the less fortunate and a persistent desire to experience the life of the social and religious other. Unlike many friars, he wore the Tarbush and mingled with Egyptians in coffee shops and restaurants, where he perfected his ‘āmiyya (colloquial Egyptian Arabic). He was, in the words of Pérennès, “a cheerful and yet unusual character” (*un personnage chaleureux mais atypique*).¹⁰⁸ His personality also clashed at times with Anawati's and Jomier's or with other members of the community. One could conjecture that these years of pastoral ministry prepared him for his days in Kabul, and the uneasy relationship with his brothers at IDEO would play a role in his departure from Cairo in 1963.

This chapter has described de Beaurecueil's early life, his formative years as a Dominican friar, and the beginning of a life as a scholar of mystical Islam and his complete devotion to the life and work of Anṣārī. The Dominican stadium of Le Saulchoir, the decisive influence of Chenu, and the establishment of the IDEO shaped his scholarly and religious vocation. The scope of this chapter depends on selective historical data and literature relevant to the friars' involvement with the Muslim and Arab worlds. This chapter is also an attempt to locate de Beaurecueil in the tradition of Dominican involvement with Islam at large, and particularly his role as a founding member of the IDEO. In a tandem arrangement, the second chapter investigates Anṣārī's eventful life and enables us to understand the dialectical relationship between de Beaurecueil's scholarly work and spiritual discipleship.

De Beaurecueil

Heeding Anṣārī’s Call

This chapter attempts to answer two key questions: Why would de Beaurecueil feel the impetus to travel to such distant lands as Kabul and Herāt in Afghanistan? Who was Anṣārī to command such love and dedication on the part of a French Dominican friar who lived nine centuries after his master’s death? In answering these questions, my analysis seeks to anchor Anṣārī’s biography in the friar’s mystical journey. Unlike many biographies, this inquiry does not pretend to offer more than a rough sketch of Anṣārī’s life, but a sketch can be useful and can at least open new perspectives. Thus, the focus of this chapter is to track de Beaurecueil’s two study travels to Afghanistan and to present sociopolitical and religious events that shaped the master’s life. Anṣārī’s strict adherence to Ḥanbalīsm and his often quarrelsome personality led to incarceration, exile, persecution, and life under suspicion. This historical and geographical inquiry sheds light on the spiritual and intellectual connection between de Beaurecueil and his “patron saint.” Events and circumstances in Anṣārī’s life captivated de Beaurecueil’s imagination and led him on an exceptional path in the field of mystical Islam. The chapter starts with de Beaurecueil’s journeys to Kabul and Herat and then focuses on the eventful life of the Pīr of Herāt within the political and theological setting of eleventh-century Khurāsān.

I. A Journey to Afghanistan, a Promised Land

After de Beaurecueil's fateful conversation with O. Yaḥyā in 1946, Anṣārī's life and work took center stage, and the IDEO provided the indispensable environment to launch de Beaurecueil's studies. Unlike Massignon's erudition on al-Ḥallāj, de Beaurecueil's choice of Anṣārī does not carry any hagiographic overtones.¹ At the outset, the endeavor was riddled with difficulties and hurdles. First, there was little scholarly research in Western languages on Anṣārī's life and works. Likewise in Arabic, resources on the master were disappointing and sparse. While Anṣārī was popular and revered in the Persian world, to a certain extent he was neglected in Arab scholarship. Second, manuscripts attributed to the Pīr of Herāt were in dire need of editing.² Finally, the contempt for mystical Islam in Cairo's intellectual circles of the time and the spectacle of popular Ṣūfīsm, or what Yaḥyā Michot terms "spiritual diabetes," was problematic. Nonetheless, Anṣārī's theological attachment to the literal meaning of the Qur'ān and the Sunna afforded his teaching respectability and reliability in the eyes of de Beaurecueil. Avon agrees:

[H]is [de Beaurecueil's] commitment to the very person of Anṣārī helped him stay on the course. Although a mystic, Anṣārī's faithfulness to the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition as well as his fidelity to the school (*madhhab*) of Ibn Ḥanbal was deemed a guarantee to the orthodoxy of his mystical theology. Anṣārī has never dispensed himself from the strict observance of the precepts of the divine law.³

Indeed, the master's mystical Ḥanbalism sparked in the Dominican friar reasons to mine further and farther. L. Gardet (d. 1986) and G. Anawati (d. 1994), in their classical book on Islamic theology, believe that for Anṣārī, mysticism is a "deep understanding or full comprehension (*fīqh*)" of the Qur'ān and the Sunna.⁴

De Beaurecueil's adamant will to visit the land of his master and its people is reminiscent of M. D. Chenu's advice to the student brothers at Le Saulchoir in 1937: "[D]o not study doctrines, but those who conceived them in their context and time. Without it, you run the risk of missing its meaning."⁵ Chenu knew firsthand the crucial necessity of understanding the

historical, geographical, and sociopolitical background of doctrines and those who constructed them. Persuaded by Chenu's intuition and heeding Anṣārī's call, de Beaurecueil journeyed to the land of his master and consequently decided to live in Kabul for twenty years. It is important to remark here that his scholarly "obsession" with the Pīr of Herāt and desire to go to Afghanistan were also fueled by his childhood longing to travel away from all that aristocratic Catholic France had to offer. Second, after seventeen years in Cairo, he was ready to move on to a different land and encounter a different people. He yearned for a direct experience with Persian-speaking Muslims. Third, his relationships with Anawati, Jomier, Boilot, and the rest of the IDEO community were not always ideal.⁶ Those friars had different personalities, and community life could be dreadful at times.⁷

To be certain, de Beaurecueil's departure to Kabul was driven by a myriad of personal and professional reasons. This move gave him complete latitude in his choice of ministry and how to organize his religious life. Away from a regular Dominican friar's life and ecclesial structure and financially independent, he found himself in uncharted territory. In such a context, mystical Islam and the examples of ordinary Muslims bore the signs of the time and embodied the presence of the divine. It was in Afghanistan that Islam and Muslims helped him to hatch an "evangelical" sense of humanity and solidarity with the most vulnerable. The dire poverty of Afghans and their ethnic and religious complexity overwhelmed his Parisian aristocratic upbringing. In *dār al Islam*, Muslims showed him another way of being a Christian.

1. The Road to Kabul

De Beaurecueil summarizes the endeavor that led to Kabul and Herat:

What a task! Relying upon Arab and Persian sources that I must track, I had to reconstruct the life of a man in his time and location, to follow the itinerary of his experience and thought, and to unleash his quintessential ideas. In addition, I had to edit, study, and translate his work, and to monitor its interpretations, and the influence he had upon his later commentators. Like a

puzzle, the endeavor was both tedious and exciting. Although, I lived in Cairo, in my mind I was in Herat for hours every day.⁸

This undertaking took seventeen years in Cairo and twenty in Kabul. His longing to visit Anṣārī's shrine in Herāt and the opportunity to uncover hidden manuscripts in Kabul remained a dream. In 1954, however, the road to Kabul became a reality when Évariste Lévi-Provençal (d. 1956) came to Cairo for his annual lecture series at the University of Giza (today Cairo University). In a conversation with G. Anawati, Lévi-Provençal inquired about de Beaurecueil's work.⁹ Anawati replied that de Beaurecueil was "still entangled in Anṣārī's work daily. He would like to go to Herat someday, and to explore the very place where Anṣārī lived, and to hunt for hidden manuscripts."¹⁰ Lévi-Provençal replied, "Of course, that is easy. He has to apply for a study grant in my department at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research) and I guarantee him a scholarship for Afghanistan."¹¹

Furthermore, by 1954, a number of Afghan scholars and intellectuals were familiar with de Beaurecueil's expertise on Anṣārī and very much interested in his possible visit to Afghanistan. A case in point is 'Abd al-Ghafūr Ravān Farhādī.¹² A short diversion is necessary here. In the summer of 1952 while in Paris, de Beaurecueil paid a visit to Massignon to update him on his work. Unexpectedly, Farhādī, a student at the Sorbonne, rang the bell while de Beaurecueil and Massignon were at the doorstep. De Beaurecueil recalls, "We were swiftly introduced. The following day, Farhādī was my guest at the priory. This was the beginning of a lifetime friendship despite the vicissitudes of time.¹³ In addition to Farhādī, Salāhuddīn Saljūqī, the ambassador of Afghanistan to Egypt, was a personal friend and fellow scholar. Saljūqī, a native from Herat, was pleased by the Dominican's erudition on the master of Herat. Nonetheless, a flight to Kabul in 1954 was no easy feat. After a year of negotiations, he was granted a visa and a scholarship from CNRS. Avon accurately notes, "[T]hanks to a scholarship granted by the CNRS, de Beaurecueil took a study trip to Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and India from September to January 1955."¹⁴

His journey to Afghanistan was eventful and lasted about three months. He arrived in Kabul on October 11, 1955. He noted, "Before me

and in contrast with a colorful India, a plain landscape opens up. A clear sky bathed the mountains. What a spectacular picture! Kabul, nothing but a big borough, was undistinguishable from afar. I for one discovered the city of my dreams, the land of Anṣārī, and my country.”¹⁵ Concerning Kabul, the capital city was devastated by years of civil war. Nonetheless, de Beaurecueil’s first impression of Kabul was romantic. “It is impossible to picture Kabul. One must see it. Imagine a chain of high mountains and in the valleys, at 1800 meters elevation, one sees a multitude of clustered and stumpy houses with terraces in clay hanging on the hillsides. A few remnants of pre-Islamic walls still protect the city. The river which runs through the city is almost dried, but turns furious in spring.”¹⁶ Was it love at the first sight? Not exactly, but de Beaurecueil had fallen in love with the land of his master long before he ever set foot in it.

2. In the Land of Anṣārī

Once in Kabul, de Beaurecueil realized the technical and logistical difficulties of collecting manuscripts. They were scattered all over the city in different libraries and often in private collections. Luckily he found help from the Afghan authorities. Avon described the goal of this first journey to Kabul and the enthusiastic response of Afghan authorities:

The main goal of the Dominican friar was to photograph important manuscripts attributed to the master. Afghan government supported kindly his mission and facilitated his research in various libraries (Herat Museum, the ministries of communications and education as well as access to private libraries, particularly King Zaher Shāh’s). Also, government officials arranged official meetings and exchanges with local scholars like Farhādī, who was a professor of law at the University of Kabul. The latter even volunteered some of his students to help out. Salāhuddīn al-Munajjed, the director of the Arab Manuscripts section, advised de Beaurecueil to take the opportunity to establish a succinct catalogue of all Arab manuscripts and to take the photograph of the most valuable ones.¹⁷

Hence, from October to December 1955, de Beaurecueil spent his time hunting for manuscripts and cataloguing them systematically.¹⁸ Though his time in Kabul seemed successful, one of the main goals of his long voyage remained unfulfilled. He had not visited Herāt and prayed at the tomb of Anṣārī. He lamented, “[B]efore I depart from Afghanistan, I still have to attend to the most important thing: a visitation to Anṣārī’s mausoleum.”¹⁹ Thanks to Farhādī, they embarked on a trip to Herāt on January 1, 1956. Herat was a shadow of its heyday during the Ghaznavid (977–1186) and Timurid dynasties (1370–1507). The four-hundred-kilometer journey from Kabul to Herāt, separated by the Hindu Kush Mountains, turned out to be an odyssey. They flew from Kabul to Kandahār, then drove for four days. Finally they arrived in Herāt on January 6, 1956. De Beaurecueil recalls:

On the morning of January 6th—on the feast of the Epiphany—I lay my eyes on Herat which was illumined by a lovely sunrise and a piercing cold. The city was completely different from Kabul. There were lines of conifers fencing the avenues, green pastures, a broad horizon, rooftops made of small domes placed side by side, pieces of trampled walls, gray pigeons and a majestic citadel opened to the blue sky.²⁰

He seemed satisfied when he noted that he had “arrived at the harbor and was deeply moved.”²¹ As soon as Farhādī and de Beaurecueil reached their destination, a series of visits began. De Beaurecueil noted, “We started touring the city, and famous people’s tombs and monuments, which ancient grandeur can only be imagined. At the small museum, I found some manuscripts and catalogued them. People seem ready to open their doors; the hospitality was magnificent, particularly at the Gāzorgāh.”²² Herat offered much to see and visit, but the most important rendezvous was about to take place. His first visit to Herat concluded with an intimate conversation with his patron saint:

I took some photographs but above all I had a *tête-à-tête* with my “old” master. Near the stele in white marble, I recited the *Pater Noster* and *al-Fatiha*. And then, I had a word with the Pīr-é-Herat. I told him “I heard your call, would you like me to stay in

your country? I am ready but it is up to you to make it happen. I must return to Egypt, but you know that my heart stays here.”²³

Three comments are in order. First, the Afghans opened their treasure chests willingly and welcomed a stranger with open arms. His work would have been nearly impossible without them. Unfortunately, only the manuscripts and de Beaurecueil, who collected them, are remembered. Apart from a few prominent names, we have no record of countless Afghans in Herat and Kabul who were instrumental to the success of his trip. Without these nameless and forgotten Aghans, his first study travel would have been far less successful.

Second, Anṣārī, a devout Ḥanbali, would not have approved such a journey. He was among the fiercest critics of pilgrimage and visits to graves (*ziyarah*). One can hardly fault de Beaurecueil’s Catholic Christianity for such behavior because countless Muslims engage in similar acts. The controversies driven by Ḥanbali and other conservative Muslims who stand against visitations of graves have not diminished Muslims’ devotions to saints and their shrines. The bitter irony of history is that the grave and burial sites of the most adamant critics of *ziyarah* often became shrines and loci of visitations.²⁴ Maria Eva Subtelney remarks, “It is noteworthy that a concession to Anṣārī’s Ḥanbalism was made in the construction of his shrine by Shah Rukh.”²⁵ The Timurid sultan’s “return to Islam policies”²⁶ banked upon Anṣārī’s Ḥanbalism by building a shrine for the master of Herat. Anṣārī’s strict attachment to the Qur’ān and the Sunna paved the way for his grave site at Gazurgah to be developed into “a little city of God.”²⁷ What a tribute to Hanbalism!

Third, at the shrine, a surreal monologue of a Dominican priest and a Ḥanbali Sufi took place. Many criticisms can be leveled against such an intimate conversation. No doubt, it is a baffling and a disturbing scene for some, but for others it is part of the mystical topography of sacred places. No one has spoken so remarkably of the spiritual significance of pilgrimages and visitations than Massignon.²⁸ Patrick Laude notes, “For Massignon, pilgrimage is the only genuine means of collective sanctification: it is the support par excellence of a kind of communal meditation in action.”²⁹ The visitation of the master’s shrine was for de Beaurecueil “a way of going out of oneself in order to converge with

another in the presence of the Divine Absentee.”³⁰ For the Dominican friar, this visitation was a prayer and a blessing. This first visit was fruitful and planted the seed for a possible return. However, the chance of a second visit was uncertain. Afghanistan has never been a tourist hub. He conceded, “This engagement ritual with Afghanistan seemed desperately without future.”³¹

Providence would decide otherwise. Seven years later, de Beaurecueil was surprised by good tidings:

One day in 1962, after I gave up all hope to return to Kabul, I was invited to the embassy where good news awaited me. On the ninth lunar centenary anniversary of Anṣārī’s death, a conference was organized in Kabul and the Afghan government wanted to make the occasion an international event. I was invited and my travel expenses covered. I returned to Kabul for the second time.³²

During his second and unexpected visit to Kabul, the friar took active participation in the conference to celebrate the ninth lunar centenary anniversary of Anṣārī’s death. After the festivities, de Beaurecueil seized the opportunity to collect more manuscripts. It was during this second trip that the possibility of living in Kabul took a serious turn. This time, the invitation came from his host Dr. Anas, the incoming minister of education. In a conversation with de Beaurecueil, Dr. Anas asked: “Don’t you feel at home here? So, what is the rush? In fact, why wouldn’t you live and work in Kabul? Since your last visit, things have changed.”³³ This invitation was unexpected but welcome. One recalled the friar’s conversation at the shrine of his master in Herat six years earlier. A path had been opened, but its realization remained uncertain.

After laborious negotiations among the different parties—D. Boilot, the superior at the IDEO; P. Avril, the provincial of the province of France; and the Afghan authorities—de Beaurecueil’s dream came true.³⁴ The university decided to hire him to teach the history of Islamic mysticism and the techniques of editing manuscripts.³⁵ De Beaurecueil recalled his feeling: “I returned to Cairo for my last winter where I thought I would live the rest of my life. Little that did I know that seventeen years in Cairo were just a

phase, a crucial training ground for another adventure, an unpredictable one. I was forty five, an ideal age to go on a mission.”³⁶ J. M. Mérigoux is correct in calling de Beaurecueil’s first trip in 1955 “the engagement” (*les fiançailles*) and the second one in 1962 “the wedding” (*les épousailles*).³⁷ The narrative of de Beaurecueil’s path to Afghanistan offers a background to the question: who was Anṣārī to command and elicit such a passion for and dedication to a land such as Afghanistan? Anṣārī was not an ordinary Sufi master.

II. Born Under the Ghaznavi Rule (977–1186)

The celebrated Ḥanbalīte Ṣūfī ‘Abdullāh Abū Ismā‘īl al-Anṣārī Ibn Muḥammad Abū Manṣur was born in Herāt on May 4, 1006. We read the following report from Anṣārī:

I was born on Friday at dusk, the 2nd of the month of sha’bān in the year 396 H/1006. I am “vernal,” for I was born in Spring. I love Spring very much. The Sun was in the seventeenth degree of Taurus when I was born, and every time it reaches that point again I complete another year. It is the middle of Spring, the season of flower and herbs.³⁸

Spring is definitely a preferred season for many. Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. echoes Anṣārī in one of his poems, “Nothing is so beautiful as Spring—When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush ...”³⁹ Who could have imagined that Anṣārī and Hopkins share a love for spring? At any rate, most of Anṣārī’s biographers depended on reliable sources.⁴⁰ There are sufficient resources to ascertain the historical data on his life. According to Mojaddedi:

The earliest biography of Anṣārī is found in Muḥammad b. Abī Ya‘lā’s (d. 1133) *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā introduces Anṣārī, in his brief (15 lines) biography, as the leader of the Sunnites (*ahl al-sunna*) in Herāt, who is known by the title Shaykh al-Islam, and is called Khaṭīb al-‘ajam (the orator of the

Persian), on account of the depth of his knowledge, his eloquence and his eminence.⁴¹

Anṣārī lived in the Persian-speaking milieu of Herāt and Khurāsān, but books attributed to him are both in Persian (his mother tongue) and Arabic (the lingua franca of the empire and Islam).⁴² Anṣārī's life under both the Ghaznavid and the Saljūq Dynasties was intellectually fertile yet tumultuous.⁴³ In addition, Anṣārī's radical dogmatism and his adamant defense of Ḥanbalīsm did not go unnoticed. His literal reading of the Qur'ān and the Sunna and above all his disdain for rationalism were legendary in Persian Sūfīsm. Like many Ḥanbalī, he was accused of anthropomorphism and ridiculed by rationalist theologians. Qāsim Ghanī filed this unflattering report:

Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī was devoid of the liberalism and freedom of intellect expected of the Sūfī masters. He considered the path of attaining truth as subservient to obedience to the artificial aspects of Ḥanbalīte School. In enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil, in harassing the mystics and Sūfīs, and even in accusing of corruption and blasphemy those mystics who fell short of performing their religious rites according to the Ḥanbalīte mandates, he surpassed all legal and religious authorities.⁴⁴

Hamid Dabashi takes the matter even further when he writes, “Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī is the most radical example of nomocentric reaction to mystical ecstasy. In his *Manāzil al-sā’irīn*, he becomes more Ḥanbalīte than Iman Ibn Ḥanbal himself in defending the cause of a radical literalism in the routine observance of rituals.”⁴⁵

Anṣārī was a Sūfī of a different kind, though comparable in importance to Sūfī giants in the Khurāsān region, such as Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū’l Khayr (d. 1049),⁴⁶ Abū’l Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1072),⁴⁷ and ‘Alī ibn ‘Uthmān al-Ḥujwīrī (d. 1073).⁴⁸ First, he shared with Ḥujwīrī the honor of having composed one of the first Sūfī treatises in the Persian language.⁴⁹ Second, unlike the theologian and Sūfī al-Qushayrī, Anṣārī was neither a theologian

nor a philosopher, and neither a jurist nor a writer but a master-teacher (a Roshi in Zen tradition). He taught the mystical way, and his oratory skills mesmerized his audience. Third, Anṣārī and Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū’l Khayr were important figures of the formative period of Ṣūfīsm and central to the development of organized Ṣūfīsm.

However, both masters represented two distinct models of leadership. Abū Sa‘īd was perhaps the most colorful and famous of all Khurāsān Ṣūfīs. He studied law, theology, and other religious sciences before adopting an ascetic life under the tutelage of Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Qaṣṣāb al-Amulī.⁵⁰ Abū Sa‘īd is one of the key figures in the earliest evolution of successful Ṣūfī Orders and centers.⁵¹ Anṣārī’s personal and professional fortunes changed as the religious and political pendulums swung in different directions. He was a committed polemicist, a celebrated Ṣūfī master, and a stern Ḥanbalī.

III. Anṣārī: A Controversial Sufi Master (or Shaykh)

1. Formative Years in Herat (1006–1033)

Herāt was for Anṣārī what Florence was for Dante and Paris was for de Beaurecueil. Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī pays tribute to Herāt:

If you are asked, which is the most beautiful of all the cities?
And if you wish to answer, say Herat!
This world is similar to a sea and the Khurāsān is like an oyster,
The city of Herat is a pearl enclosed in this oyster.⁵²

Farhādī reports the following: “He [Anṣārī] said ‘I was born in the Old Citadel (Kohan-dezh). I grew up there, [and] no other place has been dearest to me.’ ”⁵³ Among the major cities of medieval Khurāsān, such as Balkh, Marv, Bukhara, Samarqand, and Nīshāpūr, a few such as Herāt still remain major modern provincial cities.⁵⁴ Substantial architectural and historical sites convey a sense of continuity with the city’s glorious past. Among such prestigious places are Anṣārī’s shrine, the city’s old Fort, the famous Timurid Friday Mosque, and Goharshād’s tomb.⁵⁵ Herāt is in the

area that has been the site of cities since the time of Alexander the Great,⁵⁶ but with the advent of Islam it became important following the Arabs' conquest in the middle of the 7th century.

Later the city was incorporated successively into the Sāmānid, Ghaznavid, Saljūq, and Ghūrid territories. "The Pearl of Khurāsān," as the city was known, owes its existence to Harī Rūd River, which takes its sources in the mountains of Ghūr and eventually vanishes in the sands of the Karakum desert.⁵⁷ The city is located at a principal road junction and towers more than 3,000 feet above sea level. Herāt was one of the centers of the vast province of the Khurāsān. According to Jürgen Paul, scholarly works on the city's history before the Timurid period in the fifteenth century are few and far between. The author believes that the city was never the center of an empire but retained the status of a provincial center.⁵⁸ Paul concludes that "the city was to achieve imperial grandeur only in the post-Mongol period, as the center of a regional state in the fourteenth, and later on, as the brilliant center of Timurid imperial culture in the fifteenth century."⁵⁹

Nonetheless, Herāt played a prominent role in premodern Islamic civilization and was an important site of learning, second only to Nīshāpūr in cultural and scholarly achievements.⁶⁰ The great polymath and erudite Qur'ān commentator Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī died in Herāt in 1209. It is tempting to speak of Herāt in biblical terms (paraphrasing Matthew 2: 6). O you, Herāt! You are by no means the least among the old provinces of the Khurāsān, because from you shall come an erudite and staunch Ḥanbalīte poet and Ṣūfī, who would honor your long legacy of being a fertile soil for mystically inclined souls. Indeed, prophesy was fulfilled in 1070, when the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Qā'im (d. 1075) invested Anṣārī with a robe of honor and the title of *Shaykh al-Islam*.⁶¹ Farhādī reports that the decree further mentioned the titles of *Shaykh al-Shuyūkh*, *Zayn al-'Ulamā* (Ornament of the Scholars) and *Nāṣir al-Sunna* (Supporter of the Prophetic Tradition).⁶² Likewise, in 1082, the Caliph al-Muqtadī (d. 1094) repeated his predecessor's gesture and sent a sumptuous robe of honor to the master of Herat. Anṣārī was and still is the Pīr of Herāt, or the Pīr -e ḥarīqat. He is par excellence "the spiritual master of Herāt,"⁶³ and his shrine is still popular.⁶⁴

The Pīr of Herāt is descended from the *Anṣār* (helpers), and his genealogy traces him back to the people of Yathrib, who welcomed and

helped the Prophet of Islam after his hijra (migration) in 622. According to tradition,⁶⁵ Anṣārī’s ancestor Abū Ayyūb took charge of the Prophet’s journey and was known among the Anṣār as the “companion in charge of the camel saddle” (*sāhib al-rahīl*). It is believed that Abū Ayyūb’s son, Abū Manṣūr al-Anṣārī, had settled in Herāt with the conquering armies of Islam in the seventh century during the Caliphate of ‘Uthmān (d. 656).⁶⁶ Farhādī proposes the following genealogy:

‘Abdullāh Abū Ismā‘il Anṣārī, son of
Muhammad Abū Manṣūr Anṣārī, son of
‘Alī Abū Ma’ad Anṣārī, son of
Ahmad Anṣārī, son of
‘Alī Anṣārī, son of
Ja‘far Anṣārī, son of
Manṣūr Anṣārī, son of
Abū Manṣūr Anṣārī, son of
Abū Ayyūb Khālid ibn Zayd al-Khazrajī al-Najjārī al-Azdī.⁶⁷

Schimmel, de Beaurecueil and Farhādī agree that Anṣārī’s father, Muhammad Abū Manṣūr (d. 1039), who was a shopkeeper in Herāt at the time of Anṣārī’s birth, had been a mystic himself in his youth in Balkh.⁶⁸ W. Thackston confirms that “‘Abdullāh inherited a tendency toward Ṣūfīsm, the ‘inner’ or spiritual aspect of Islam, from his father, Abū Manṣūr Muhammad, who had been trained in the way of abstinence and renunciation of worldly affairs by an ascetic in Balkh.”⁶⁹ Abū Manṣūr was first a disciple of the ascetic Ṣūfī Shaykh Abū ’l Muẓaffar Ḥabbāl al-Tirmidhī. This master schooled Anṣārī’s father in the rigorous art of spiritual discipline and exercises and in scrupulous observation of dietary laws.⁷⁰ Later, Abū Manṣūr joined the Ṣūfī circle of Sharīf Ḥamza ‘Aqīlī of Termez (d. 1060),⁷¹ who was revered for his spiritual blessings or divine graces (*baraka*) and supernatural powers (*karāma*). He had a circle of renowned Ṣūfīs with him, among whom were ‘Abd’l-Qāsim Hannāna, ‘Ārif ‘Ayyār, and ‘Abd’l-Malik Iskāf, one of the few surviving disciples of al-Hallāj (d. 922).⁷²

Although Abū Mansūr returned to Herāt and started a family, he remained a dedicated Ṣūfī and associated with Ṣūfī masters in the city. Married life, however, never suited him. One day, while Anṣārī was still young, his father abandoned his shop, wife, and family to return to his mystical life in Balkh. Hence, he left Anṣārī and his siblings in a dire socioeconomic predicament. Most of Anṣārī’s biographers speculate about the time of his father’s departure. De Beaurecueil believes that his father left while Anṣārī was about ten years old. He writes, “The departure took place, we believe, around the year 1015. His son was about ten years old.”⁷³ Others suggest that Anṣārī was almost fourteen when his father left Herāt for good.⁷⁴ In spite of this short-lived marital life, de Beaurecueil asserts, “Abū Mansūr gave his son an example of an austere life, a yearning for science, and a deep sense of religiosity.”⁷⁵ Anṣārī’s childhood was neither idyllic nor comfortable but blessed with key teachers and mentors who instilled in the young man a love for learning and an enthusiasm for memorization that would determine the course of his life.

Before Anṣārī’s father deserted his family to return to ascetic Ṣūfī life in Balkh, he enrolled his son in school at an early age. He made sure that the youngster had proper and sound religious education and good knowledge of Arabic and Persian. In the words of de Beaurecueil, Anṣārī revered his father because he was pious and righteous, scrupulous on matters of ritual practices, and strictly observant of the sharī‘ah. He was a Ṣūfī who read and recited the Qur’ān constantly. He was the man who guided his son’s first steps toward an accomplished religious and mystical life.⁷⁶ Farhādī and de Beaurecueil note that by the age of four, Anṣārī had started learning to read the Qur’ān under a female teacher.⁷⁷ Soon, however, he was removed and put under the tutelage of a male teacher. In his own words, Anṣārī tells the history of his early education:

First, I was sent to a female teacher, but some thought that it might be harmful to me. At the age of four, I was sent to the school of Mālīnī. At the age of nine, I learned to write under the supervision of qadi Abū Mansūr and Jārūdī. At the age of fourteen, they allowed me to sit among their pupils. Still very young, I took courses with another learned teacher. I was very

good at composing poetic verses and my classmates became jealous of me.⁷⁸

When it came to ḥadīth instruction, Anṣārī's father made a deliberate choice to entrust his son to two esteemed traditionists, qādī Abū Maṇṣūr Azdī (d. 1019) and the remarkable ḥāfiẓ Jārūdī (d. 1023). The former was an eminent jurist and a staunch traditionist. He was the chief shāfi‘ite qādī of Herāt. Notwithstanding his advanced age, he stood aggressively against rationalist theologians and earned the title of “a sharp sword against the innovators.”⁷⁹ This temperament of qādī Abū Maṇṣūr Azdī would later match Anṣārī's own aggressive character against his opponents. Until qādī Abū Maṇṣūr Azdī's death in 1019, Anṣārī took lessons from both Shaykhs. Jārūdī took the youngster under his tutelage for ḥadīth lessons. Unlike qādī Abū Maṇṣūr Azdī, Jārūdī was not confrontational but a man endowed with an unusual gift of memorization. He was respected for his detachment from earthly goods and scrupulous in avoiding illicit or prohibited things.⁸⁰ After the death of qādī Abū Maṇṣūr Azdī, Jārūdī took complete charge of Anṣārī's education. Jārūdī was so impressed by his disciple's intelligence and hard work that he chose Anṣārī to succeed him after his death. From qādī Abū Maṇṣūr Azdī, Anṣārī inherited an aggressive zeal against the “innovators,” and from Jārūdī he acquired a methodology of Qur'ānic commentary and the art of ḥadīth memorization.

To return to Anṣārī's early education, it is important to remark that his father, Muḥammad Abū Maṇṣūr, not only was determined to provide a correct religious education for his son, but he also sought to extend his son's curriculum to Persian and Arabic literati. Thus, poetry was added under the supervision of a few literati of Herāt. Anṣārī learned fast and memorized many passages of the Qur'ān, large numbers of ḥadīths, and poetry to the point that he soon started writing prose and poetry himself. Even though the family remained poor, friends and relatives helped. But it was the intelligence and steadfastness of Anṣārī himself that kept him in school.⁸¹ He would continue to study the Qur'ān, the prophetic tradition,

and poetry steadily. De Beaurecueil filed this report verbatim on behalf of Anṣārī:

Early in the morning, I attended Qurānic recitation. Upon return, I wrote down six pages that I committed to memory. Once this task completed, around nine in the morning, I went to my literature teacher where I wrote/copied all day long. Such a busy schedule allowed me no time for rest. However, I was not at the end of my task because I had to attend to other work, to the point that very often, I prolonged my days way beyond the last prayer of the evening.⁸²

Once Anṣārī was deprived of his father's care and guidance, he found spiritual and material abode with two Ṣūfī shaykhs, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Ammār Shaybānī and Abū Ismā‘īlī Aḥmad Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza, known as shaykh ‘Ammū. ‘Ammār Shaybānī was an erudite Qur’ānic commentator and a staunch adversary of the Ash‘arī theology. He taught the youngster Qur’ānic commentary and generously took care of his student's material needs. From Jāmī's *Nafahāt al- Uns*, de Beaurecueil quotes Anṣārī's tribute to his teacher Yahya Ibn ‘Ammār Shaybānī: “Would I have not met him, I would not have been able to utter a word concerning Qurānic exegesis,”⁸³ and he adds, “Yaḥyā was a King disguised as a servant.”⁸⁴

It was, however, the distinguished Ṣūfī master, shaykh ‘Ammū, who picked up where Anṣārī's father had left off. The shaykh had traveled extensively in pursuit of spiritual knowledge and met venerated Sufi masters in Baghdaḍ, Mecca, and all over the Khurāsān region. He built a Ṣūfī lodge (*khānqāh*) at the outskirts of Herāt, where mature Ṣūfis and novices met for spiritual exercises. His traveling routine kept him on the road, and he would later appoint Anṣārī to become his successor after his death. The close relationship between the young man and his master seemed to defy the age gap and the standard master-disciple bond. De Beaurecueil writes:

In spite of the age difference, the relationship between Anṣārī and his Shaykh was not typical of a disciple and a master. Rather, it was friendship among equals. If Shaykh ‘Ammū taught the

youngster the wealth of knowledge he had accumulated during his countless travels, and recited aphorisms and anecdotes received from other distinguished Shaykhs, ‘Ammū did not hesitate to learn from his pupil whose curiosity and vitality of a young soul were characteristic of his demeanor.⁸⁵

Another important figure in Anṣārī’s life was Abd’l-Jabbār Jarrāḥī, a fine scholar in ḥadīth. He had a minor yet decisive influence on Anṣārī. He taught his pupil the Prophetic tradition from al-Tirmidhī’s *Jāmi’* (Collection). For the rest of his life, Anṣārī preferred *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī* to Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s *ṣahīhayni* or any other ḥadīth collection, for that matter. To the people of Quhandiz, Shaykh ‘Ammū declared, “Watch out for ‘Abdullāh; he dispenses the aura of an imam.”⁸⁶

The most significant teacher was Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh Taqī Sijistānī (d. c. 1025), a Hanbalī Ṣūfī. Taqī won Anṣārī’s respect and reverence for his Ḥanbalīsm and his versatility in spiritual matters. The youngster seemed to have struck a chord of sympathy and admiration in many of his teachers. Taqī would praise the young man in flattering terms: “O ‘Abdullāh Bā Manṣūr! Praise be to God! What a light God has put in your heart!”⁸⁷ From Taqī, Anṣārī acquired a visceral attachment to Ḥanbalīte theology and spirituality and also an aversion for honors, with a lifelong suspicion of the rich and powerful. Later he paid tribute to his teacher in these words: “He [Taqī] was my master and teacher in Ḥanbalīte creed. Had I never met him, I would never have come to know the belief of the Ḥanbalītes.”⁸⁸

In his final days, Anṣārī wrote in one of his poems, “I am a Ḥanbalī, while living and dying. This is my testament, O brothers.”⁸⁹ Makdisi asserts,

This Harawī (al-Anṣārī al-Harawī) was a Ḥanbalī; so Ḥanbalī was he that he declared that his last will and testament would be to exhort all Muslims to become Ḥanbalīs. Harawī had lived his whole Ṣūfī life and died a Ḥanbalī when Ghazzālī had not yet come to Baghdaḍ; in fact had not as yet turned seriously to Ṣūfīsm.⁹⁰

De Beaurecueil remarks that Ḥanbalīsm for Anṣārī was strictly theological and not juridical. The Pīr of Herāt was unyielding in his attachment to the letter of the Qur’ān and the Sunna, but often enough, Anṣārī adopted Shāfi‘ī solutions in jurisprudence.⁹¹ “We must remark that it is only in matter of belief (*i’tiqād*). In jurisprudence, Anṣārī opted for Shāfi‘ite solutions. But when it came to matters of faith, he remained an adamant disciple of Ibn Ḥanbal.”⁹² Similarly, in the preface of his English translation of the *Ṣad maydān*, Munir Ahmad Mughal states, “Khwāja ‘Abdullāh followed the school of Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal in matter of *Aṣl* (fundamental) and Imām Shāfi‘ī in matter of *furū‘* (branches).”⁹³ At any rate, up to this moment, Anṣārī seemed satisfied with his life in Herāt; however, the passing away of his major teachers altered his stable life.

2. Maturity and Study Travels to Nīshāpūr

His father, Abū Manṣūr, and some important teachers, such as Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Ammū, Taqī Sijistānī, and many other influential Ṣūfī mentors and traditionists, contributed to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual formation of the young Anṣārī. These teachers taught the Pīr of Herāt core Islamic sciences: tradition, Qur’ānic exegesis, and Ṣūfism. Unfortunately, after the death of Taqī in 1025, Anṣārī’s life took a new turn. Deeply affected by the loss of several other teachers (qādī Manṣūr Azdī in 1019, Jarrāḥī in 1021, and Jārūdī in 1023), he decided to travel to Nīshāpūr (capital of the Khurāsān) to further his education. De Beaurecueil asserted that Anṣārī left a year after Taqī’s death to pursue his study of ḥadīth and fiqh.⁹⁴ He also looked forward to sitting at the feet of renowned and learned teachers to take advantage of their scholarship, receive their blessings, and enjoy their company.

Once in Nīshāpūr, Anṣārī collected ḥadīths largely from the students of the great traditionist Abū ’l-‘Abbās Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Asamm (d. 957), most of them advanced in age, such as Abū Sa‘īd Ṣayrafi (d. 1030), the well-versed Ḥanbalī Abū’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ṭirāzī (d. 1031), the Qur’ān commentator Abū Naṣr Manṣūr al-Mufassir (d. 1031), and the grammarian Abū ’l-Ḥasan Aḥmad Salīṭī (d. 1030).⁹⁵ But he stayed away from all scholars of the Ash‘arīte and Mu‘tazilīte schools. He refused to hear and

collect ḥadīths from the great qādī Abū Bakr al-Hīrī (d. 1030) because he was an Ash‘arīte in theology. He sought to receive ḥadīth only from traditionists at the exclusion of “innovators.”⁹⁶

This uncompromising position penalized him dearly. He did not have the honor of meeting such renowned scholars in Nīshāpūr as Imām Ibrāhīm al-İsfayānī (d. 1027), Abū Muḥammad al-Juwainī (d. 1047) (the father of the great Imām al-Haramayn), Shaykh al-Islam Ismā‘īl al-Şābūnī (d. 1032), and Abū Qāsim al-Qushayrī, all of whom followed Ash‘arīte theology.⁹⁷ Therefore, Anṣārī’s inflexible Ḥanbalīsm set him squarely in opposition to all kinds of rationalist schools. Both his zeal for learning and his staunch Ḥanbalīte stand served him well but also hurt him at times.

Unlike many Islamic scholars of his time who traveled extensively, Anṣārī left Herāt on only a few occasions: in pursuit of knowledge in Nīshāpūr, in two attempts to perform the pilgrimage (ḥajj) in Mecca,⁹⁸ and following exile due to theological conflicts. After his study travel to Nīshāpūr in 1026, Anṣārī agreed to accompany Imām Abū ’l-Faḍl b. Sa‘d of Herāt to Mecca for ḥajj in 1032. But when their caravan reached Baghdād, they learned that there was a dire shortage of water in Mecca and the prices were exorbitant. In addition, an epidemic of smallpox had broken out in the Ḥijāz in western Arabia and the Khurāsān region. They had to abort the trip and return home.⁹⁹ Undeterred by this first failed attempt to go to perform the ḥajj, Anṣārī embarked on his second attempt a year later, hoping for a better outcome.¹⁰⁰ This time, the caravan had not passed Rayy when bad news reached them. The roads between Iraq and Ḥijāz were too dangerous for travel. Many pilgrim caravans were being robbed and brutalized by bands of Bedouins. Once again, his attempt to go to ḥajj was unsuccessful. But on his way back to Herāt, Anṣārī met with some prominent Ṣūfī masters. In Damghān he visited with Shaykh Muḥammad Qaṣṣāb ‘Āmulī, a disciple of the famous Abū ’l- Qaṣṣāb.¹⁰¹

In Nīshāpūr he had the good fortune of meeting the Ṣūfī Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad Abū ’l- Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 1033).¹⁰² In *Kharaqānī: Paroles d’un Soufi*, Christiane Tortel remarks that Kharaqānī was hailed as a supreme master and a *Qutb* (pole or pillar) of his time in spiritual matters. Through his insightful words, he was in the spiritual, mystical, and

historical genealogy of those who bear the divine light. He was illiterate but unparalleled in mystical matters, and he distinguished himself by the power of his ecstatic sayings. Sultans and established Ṣūfī masters sought his counsel and spiritual wisdom. Most of his phrases were bold utterances in which the humility of the masters collided with God's glory.¹⁰³ During Anṣārī's visit with Kharaqānī, the Shaykh mesmerized the young Anṣārī to the point that he declared later, "Had I never met Kharaqānī, I would never have known Reality. He mixed, constantly, this and That, namely, the self and Reality."¹⁰⁴ De Beaurecueil adds, "The Reality (*ḥaqīqah*) is the secret of the mystical life, beyond the appearances."¹⁰⁵ Kharaqānī was not a scholar or theorizer of spiritual life, but he was a Ṣūfī without guile. How did this critical encounter occur? Fate had it that while in Nīshāpūr, Anṣārī ran into the famous Ṣūfī Abū Sa‘id Abū'l-Khayr (d. 1049), who told him about Kharaqānī.¹⁰⁶ The elderly and illiterate Ṣūfī would have the deepest impact on Anṣārī's mystical journey.

Schimmel reports, "This enthusiastic and demanding master [Kharaqānī] caused a spiritual change in ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, with the result that Anṣārī began to write his commentary on the Koran, which was, unhappily, never finished."¹⁰⁷ Kharaqānī read into Anṣārī's heart and answered his spoken and unspoken fundamental questions. "He not only deterred Anṣārī from trying to go on pilgrimage by making him realize that "God was as likely to be in Khurāsān as in Ḥijāz," but also instructed him to start training his own disciples."¹⁰⁸ Farhādī reported that while in conversation with Anṣārī, "Kharaqānī went into ecstasy and burst into tears."¹⁰⁹ From Kharaqānī, Anṣārī learned that to be a Ṣūfī does not consist of outward appearances; "one does not become a Ṣūfī by virtue of one's patched frock and prayer mat; one does not become Ṣūfī by adopting the customs and manners of the Ṣūfīs; a Ṣūfī is that which is not!" As Kharaqānī concluded, "A Ṣūfī is a day that has no need of the sun, a night that has no need of the moon and the stars, a 'not-being' that has no being."¹¹⁰ De Beaurecueil believes that two masters have mostly inspired Anṣārī: Taqī al-Sijistānī and Kharaqānī. The first made him a Ḥanbalī and the second a Ṣūfī. He writes, "An adept reader of hearts like Taqī Sijistānī, the elder and illiterate peasant impressed deeply Anṣārī. Their meeting was

like going on pilgrimage and he decided to abandon his desire to return to Mecca.”¹¹¹

After meeting with the ecstatic Kharaqānī, Anṣārī viewed Ṣūfīsm as “something that neither harms the soles of the feet nor leaves a trail of dust behind.”¹¹² For him, a Ṣūfī perfects him- or herself through actions of genuine humility and frees him- or herself from the pitfalls of pride. He returned to Herāt and embarked on teaching ḥadīth, Qur’ān commentary, and Ṣūfīsm. At the age of twenty-seven, Anṣārī was ready to take on teaching responsibilities after being schooled by different teachers in and out of Herāt. Hence, the first trip to Nīshāpūr (1026) after the death of his childhood teachers and the two failed attempts to go to Mecca for hajj (1032–1033) gave him the opportunity to meet key traditionist Ṣūfīs, ḥadīth, and Qur’ān scholars. These study trips crystallized his skills, and the encounter with Kharaqānī offered the spiritual impetus he had been looking for in life. Anṣārī was ready to gather around him a circle of disciples and students. Soon enough, his lectures were attended by senior Ṣūfīs and learned folks of Herāt and its surroundings.¹¹³

Anṣārī was an erudite orator and a bold preacher. He lectured at the Ṣūfī lodges and mosques. There, he triumphed before his audiences. He exerted his utmost talents in full consciousness. Anṣārī was an orator and a popular preacher. He declared, “Whoever has not seen my manner of conducting meetings and preaching, and yet speaks ill of me, I forgive him.”¹¹⁴ Those years after he returned from Nīshāpūr were fruitful and calm. However, tranquility was not to last long. Soon enough, Anṣārī would engage in polemics and debates against rationalist theologians. As a result, he suffered trials and hardships at the hands of his rivals. His literalist reading of the Qur’ān led to accusations of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). But, similarly to Imām Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), his harassment, exile, and imprisonment would be vindicated later. His fame grew, and the multiple public persecutions by Ash‘arī and Saljūq political authorities did not deter Anṣārī’s staunch criticism against rationalism of all types.

2.1. Hardship and Triumph (1042–1063)

As noted earlier in this chapter, Anṣārī had to confront opposing and clashing schools of thought in his town about key theological issues: God’s

essence and attributes; the created or uncreated nature of the Qur’ān; literal or metaphoric hermeneutic of the Qur’ān; and ḥadīth, predestination, human agency, and free will. As a solid Ḥanbalī, he was convinced that the teaching of the prophetic tradition could not remain neutral. He opposed head-on what he considered vain discussions and, above all, a sacrilegious intrusion of reason where the Qur’ānic revelations had settled the matter. He advocated a literal reading of the text and submission to its letter even though humans could not explain the modality (the why and how). He attacked the Ash‘arīs and Mu‘tazilīs publicly and engaged in a serious conflict with them. In 1039, the Sultan Mas‘ūd was visiting Herāt, and Anṣārī’s adversaries sought to denounce him and obtain his condemnation for anthropomorphism.¹¹⁵ Summoned before the Sultan, Anṣārī defended his position by reciting the Qur’ānic passages and ḥadīth that mentioned God’s throne, hands, and face. The Sultan Mas‘ūd, as de Beaurecueil remarks, had other more urgent affairs to handle than worrying about Anṣārī’s alleged anthropomorphism. He was dismissed with honor.¹¹⁶

This victory would be short lived. After Mas‘ūd (d. 1949) was suddenly assassinated in 1041, a group of theologians gathered and banned Anṣārī from teaching and holding meetings. He was forced to leave Herāt and sought refuge in nearby Chakīwan. In 1044, he returned to Herāt and resumed his teachings. He was forty years old and had matured and been seasoned by several ordeals. De Beaurecueil believes that Anṣārī restarted his major commentary on the Qur’ān upon his return. He adopted the methodology of his former teacher, Yahya Ibn ‘Ammār, but he went beyond a literal treatment of the sacred text to pay attention to questions it raised.¹¹⁷ Sadly, forty-three years later, at his death, his commentary on the Qur’ān had not been brought to a conclusion.

At the time of Anṣārī’s return in Herāt in 1041, even with a greater sense of spiritual maturity, his troubles were not over. In 1046, another alliance of Ash‘arīte and Mu‘tazilite theologians took advantage of the political confusion and condemned Anṣārī. This time they exiled and imprisoned him in Būchanj (a two-day walk from Herāt). As usual, prison and exile were a time of deep soul-searching and heavy spiritual exercises. He recalled Taqī’s and Kharaqānī’s wisdom and advice and decided to return to the essentials in his teaching and preaching. According to de Beaurecueil, he meditated for hours on this passage: Q.2:160–65.¹¹⁸

Fortunately for Anṣārī, this later imprisonment would last just a year. His days of trials then seemed over, and he would experience tranquility for a long while.¹¹⁹ Upon his return to Herāt, he taught and commented extensively on Q.2:160–65. He focused his lectures solely on the spiritual life, understood as a perpetual effort to love God according to the Qur’ān and the prophetic example. For a little while, Anṣārī dropped his polemics against rationalist theologians. The reason might have been that on the military front, Mawdūd, son and heir of Mas‘ūd’s throne, was battling the Turkmen to salvage his power. The people of Herāt were deeply preoccupied by the political situation and tired of theological skirmishes.

For Anṣārī, the triumph of the Saljūq Sultan Tughrīl Beg over Mas‘ūd of Ghazna ushered in an era of tranquility. Tughrīl Beg’s vizier, Abū Naṣr Kundurī, chased away the “innovators” and cursed them openly.¹²⁰ Many scholars lost their teaching positions and were harassed, silenced, imprisoned, or had to flee. Al-Qushayrī intervened to defend the rationalist schools but to no avail. He wrote a treatise bemoaning the state of the community at war with itself and torn apart by hatred and theological oppositions. Thus, Qushayrī, in his *Shikāyat ahl al-Sunna bi-hikāya ma nālahum min al-mīhnā* (The complaint of the people of Sunna in telling the story of what has befallen them during the inquisition), defended the rationalists’ cause, but he could not stop the persecution. Another giant, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), was forced to flee from Nīshāpūr to the Ḥijāz.¹²¹

Unlike these seminal scholars and masters, this period was a time of vindication for Anṣārī. For the next eleven years, he enjoyed peace and prestige (1053–1064).¹²² His fame reached far beyond the Khurāsān region, and renowned scholars, such as the prominent Baghdādi poets Abū ’l-Ḥasan al-Bakharzī and Abū ’l-Qāsim al-Zuzanī (known as al-Barī), sought to meet him. They traveled to Herāt to sit at the feet of the Pīr and listen to his lectures on the Qur’ān and the Sunna and enjoy his mystical poems.¹²³

Determined to assert his Ḥanbalīte Šūfīsm against all odds, Anṣārī launched a renewed systematic attack against those he labeled “innovators.” His determination, however, was quelled by a change of power in Baghdād. Tughrīl Beg’s successor, Alp Arslān (1063–72), and his great vizier, Nīzām al-Mulk (1072–92), were now in power. The Sultan and his vizier were

Ash‘arite in theology and Ḥanafī and Shāfi‘ī in *madhhab*, respectively. Thus, Anṣārī ran into trouble again. In 1064, while Nizām al-Mulk was passing through Herāt, Anṣārī was summoned before him to answer accusations put forward by Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī jurists. According to de Beaurecueil and Farhādī, Anṣārī was challenged to engage in theological debate with his opponents. Called upon by the vizier to answer a specific question, Anṣārī replied, “I do not discuss matters other than what I have in my left and right sleeves.” And the vizier asked, “So what do you have in your sleeves?” Anṣārī replied, “In my right sleeve, the Book of God, and in my left, the Sunna of the Messenger of God.”¹²⁴ The vizier dismissed him without any blame and ended the debate, but his opponents did not give up. Two years later in 1066, they convinced the vizier Nizām al-Mulk to exile Anṣārī to Balkh for a year.¹²⁵

2.2. *The End Game (1080–89)*

Concisely, de Beaurecueil describes Anṣārī’s final years:

Far from slowing down, ill health seemed to have enticed Anṣārī to dictate his most important works to his young and fervent disciples. The voluminous book, *Condemnation of Speculative Theology and its Practitioners* (*Dham al-Kalām*) was dictated in 474/1082; *The Stages of the Wayfarers* (*Manāzil al-sa’irīn*) the following year, and a brief treatise on the deficiencies of the Stages (*kitāb ‘Ilal al-maqāmāt*) shortly after. Probably, his *Generation of Sufis* (*Ṭabaqāt al-Sufiyya*) dated back to the same period.¹²⁶

During his last years (1080–89), Anṣārī experienced “celebrity and grandeur”¹²⁷ but also the infirmities of old age. The respect and reverence due a master-teacher arrived almost at the time when Anṣārī had lost his sight at the age of seventy-four. Unlike the year 1066, when he was exiled to Balkh by Nizām al Mulk, in 1082 the vizier convinced the caliph al-Muqtadī to honor Anṣārī, as his predecessor had.¹²⁸ Anṣārī received another robe of honor along with honorific titles. According to de Beaurecueil,

Nizām al-Mulk's move was more of a political tactic than a genuine action. He used the opportunity to maintain peace in Herāt between Anṣārī and his disciples and rationalist theologians. These honors were meant to quell any attempts to stir up unrest and conflict and nothing more.¹²⁹

Most importantly, the Pīr of Herāt harnessed all his energy to dictate his last didactic manuals for wayfarers to attack rationalist theologians. Subsequent to his lost vision and with an awareness of his own end, he seems to have been prompted to accelerate his instruction to faithful disciples. Anṣārī knew that time was running out and death was near. Among his closest students and scribes, the following are worth mentioning: Abd ’l-Awwal, the ḥāfiẓ ‘Abū ’l Khayr ‘Abdallāh ibn Marzūq, ‘Abū Naṣr al-Mu’tamin Sājī, ‘Abd ’l-Malik Karrukhī, Muḥammad Saydalānī, Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir Maqdisī, and Yūsuf al-Hamadhānī, the inheritor of his legacy.¹³⁰ At the age of eighty-three, Anṣārī died in the city of his birth on Friday, March 8, 1089, and was buried in Gāzargāh, near the Shaykh ‘Ammū’s tomb and *khāngāh*.¹³¹

There is a consensus about the Pīr of Herāt’s legacy:

His biographers are unanimous in praising his piety, the breadth of his knowledge in all branches of the religious sciences, and the indomitable fervor of his devotion to the Qur’ān, Sunna, and the school of Ibn Ḥanbal, which led him to be accused by his enemies of bigoted fanaticism and anthropomorphism.”¹³²

Two periods marked this unique life, a time of formation (from birth to his meeting with Kharaqānī) and a phase of teaching (from his return from his second failed attempt to go to perform the ḥajj until his death).¹³³ Despite three exiles, two imprisonments, political unrest, and theological upheavals, Anṣārī remained true to his Ḥanbalīte theology and spirituality. After all his troubles, he experienced peace and honor. When he lost his sight later in life, he finally acceded to his disciples’ request to dictate his most important manuals for the wayfarers on the spiritual journey. De Beaurecueil summarizes his life:

Nubādhān harkens back to humility, and sets him off on a long spiritual journey marred with trials. Here, the life of the mystic

and the polemicist meet. In 438 H., imprisonment at Būshanj teaches Anṣārī the path of mystical love, which would inspire his qurānic commentaries for a long time. The exile at Balkh in 456 H., awakens in him the understanding that beyond love, God is the source of all things in spiritual life. He would discover step by step and through painful experiences the inner Reality which Kharaqānī drew his attentions to powerfully. He seems to have understood Reality because once he lost his sight; he would promptly dictate his book on the spiritual stages to his young disciples.¹³⁴

Anṣārī was a gifted and erudite mystic but also aggressive against his opponents in theology.¹³⁵ De Beaurecueil considered him to be “one of the outstanding figures in Khurāsān in 11th century: commentator of the Qur’ān, traditionalist, polemicist, and spiritual master, known for his oratory and poetic talents in Arabic and Persian,”¹³⁶ and the friar often referred to Anṣārī as his master and teacher. In his biography of Anṣārī, there is a kind of posthumous conversation between the Dominican friar and his “patron saint.” This is a kind of “*mémoire d’outre tombe*” (memoirs beyond the grave) written by de Beaurecueil. His biography of the master is the most comprehensive and well documented in any Western language. It is no wonder that Farhādī translated it into Persian.¹³⁷

To the best of our knowledge, all scholars of Anṣārī in Islamic and Western languages take de Beaurecueil’s scholarship seriously. He read and studied Anṣārī as a disciple and as a devotee would study his or her master. He called upon Anṣārī in his prayers and intimate conversations. In a sense, there seems to be a real similarity between de Beaurecueil’s relationship with Anṣārī and Massignon’s with al-Ḥallāj, or H. Corbin’s with Yayḥā Suhrawardī. There is little indication of manifest incompatibilities between de Beaurecueil’s teacher’s faith tradition, Islam, and de Beaurecueil’s Roman Catholic convictions. Maybe the real hint of the Dominican friar’s “obsession” with his master lies here:

Thus, will, self-denial, detachment, patience, sadness, fear, hope, thanksgiving, love, and nostalgia are the stages of people of the law who are in pursuit of the essence of the inner Reality. When

they grasp it, the stages of the wayfarers vanish, and whatever is not real disappears, and only subsists that which has never ceased to be—“But will abide forever the Face of your Lord.”
(Q.55:27)¹³⁸

Anṣārī’s biography is a window into the complex reasons of de Beaurecueil’s scholarship. Equally important are his formation at Le Saulchoir and his fascination for such distant lands as Afghanistan. The narrative of both lives prepared the ground for the spiritual and mystical connections set out in the following chapters. Both men were different in temperament. Anṣārī was a fierce polemicist who did not hesitate to use violence against his rivals, and de Beaurecueil shied away from theological confrontations and diatribes. The spiritual connections between them seem to have defied centuries of separation and incommensurable differences of religious tradition, culture, and civilization.

The first and second chapters of this book have laid bare those differences to clarify the following two chapters. These two biographical narratives, and particularly the master’s biography, hint at the real interest of a twentieth-century French Dominican friar who will find a spiritual teacher in a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī of eleventh-century Khurāsān. Those narratives of two religiously devoted men (“*deux hommes de Dieu*”) unveil their personalities and show the force of their influential teachers. The Ṣūfī Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad Abū ’l-Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 1033) was as influential on Anṣārī as Marie Dominique Chenu (d. 1990) was on de Beaurecueil. Concerning de Beaurecueil, the context in which he worked and the ways in which his work and ideas took shape shed essential light on [chapters 3](#) and [4](#). Indeed, those chapters focus on de Beaurecueil’s intellectual biography, which reflects his erudition on works attributed to Anṣārī. Finally, the thrust of the friar’s scholarship is his practical mysticism, *praxis mystica*. His endeavor represents a significant and unique path in the field of scholarship on Islam.

De Beaurecueil

A Premier Scholar of Anṣārī’s Works

De Beaurecueil’s erudition was the backdrop for his pastoral mysticism in the land of his master. The life-giving principle of his work in Kabul is rooted in his Dominican spirituality and years of scholarship on the master’s spiritual thought and teachings. Unfortunately, a single chapter cannot do justice to the depth and breadth of de Beaurecueil’s scholarship. His approach to the study of Anṣārī’s works in the original and contribution to the understanding of Hanbali Ṣūfī tradition are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, because de Beaurecueil’s mystical intuition led him to focus primarily on the master’s spiritual manuals,¹ this chapter intends to survey Anṣārī’s bibliography with a focus on his spiritual teachings. This study draws attention to how this spiritual (or mystical) conversation transformed de Beaurecueil’s religious *weltanschauung* from “a dry erudite Orientalism” (*un orientalisme sèchement érudit*)² to a deeply personal understanding of his own identity as a friar preacher. Claude Geffré reminds us that “anytime we take the religious other seriously in his or her alterity, we are invited to a deeper grasp of our own identity.”³

This chapter explores parts of Anṣārī’s work through selections of de Beaurecueil’s annotations, translations, and commentaries on the most important and widely circulated books attributed to the Pīr of Herāt. I offer an overview of the collection of books attributed to Anṣārī and touch on the questions of authenticity and reliability that have plagued the available manuscripts. Finally, this investigation focuses on the most representative spiritual treatises, *Kitāb Ṣad Maydān* (The Hundred Fields/Grounds)⁴ and *Kitāb Manāzil al-Sā‘irīn* (The Stages of the Wayfarers), and concludes with

Anṣārī's most popular collection of intimate conversations with God, the *Munājāt* (Intimate Conversation with God).

I. The Corpus Attributed to Anṣārī⁵

In her dissertation on Anṣārī's *Ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Grounds), Nahid Angh brings a fresh insight to the discussion at hand. She rightly notes that:

Abdu'llāh Anṣārī's spiritual and literary expertise covers an extensive domain from spiritual and religious teachings to works of literature and poetry, from exegesis of the Qur'ān to the stations of the spiritual journey, devotional invocations and biographies of Ṣūfīs and teachers."⁶

De Beaurecueil could not have agreed more. On February 9, 1971, he presented his lifetime research on Anṣārī's spiritual thought and life in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of *doctorat d'État* at the Sorbonne.⁷ It was a moment of great achievement in his long career as a scholar of the mystical dimensions of Islam, and particularly, his investment in the life and writings attributed to Anṣārī. Arguably, de Beaurecueil is the best biographer, exegete and translator of the Pīr of Herāt's corpus in any Western language.⁸

For de Beaurecueil, academic recognition for his work was secondary compared to the deep motivation at the source of his scholarship. He believed that mysticism was universal in nature and concrete in expression. Anṣārī's works were more than the subject of a monograph or an orientalist's obsession or passion. His scholarship led him into an unexpected territory, a land of encounter. Chronologically, de Beaurecueil's scholarship on the Pīr of Herāt's work falls into three major periods: in Cairo at the IDEO from 1946 to 1965, then in Kabul from 1965 to 1985, and finally in Paris from 1985 to his death in 2005.

In his biographical collection on Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil gives an account of the master's bibliography both in Persian and Arabic. In terms of Persian mystical history, Anṣārī was a pioneer in many ways. He was the first to produce in local Persian dialect a short mnemonic treatise on a

difficult and complex subject matter like Ṣūfīsm, namely, *Ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Grounds). Even though Ḥujwīrī’s *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Revelation of the Mystery) in Persian and Qushayrī’s *Risāla* in Arabic⁹ were also early works on the meaning of key Ṣūfī terms, “*Ṣad maydān* remains,” as Pūrjavādī writes, “the first independent and single classic written in Persian to address stations and the levels of *sulūk*, the inner journey.”¹⁰ Farhādī agrees with Pūrjavādī and adds, “His [Anṣārī’s] *Hundred Grounds*, however, retains its importance as the first didactic treatise on Ṣūfīsm to be written in Persian, and specifically intended to serve as a mnemonic manual for mystics.”¹¹ Anṣārī’s *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Generations of the Ṣūfīs) and *Kashf al-asrār* (Unveiling of the Secrets) are both pioneering works in Persian mystical tradition.

De Beaurecueil remarks that the master’s spiritual treatises influenced generations of scholars and Ṣūfīs within and beyond his immediate circles. He found more than forty manuscripts and examined the work of many commentators on *The Stages of the Wayfarers* from the thirteenth to twentieth centuries.¹² In addition *The Hundred Grounds* and *The Stages of the Wayfarers* were read, meditated on, commented on, and used by Ṣūfīs as far away as Andalusia. Ibn al-‘Arīf (d. 1141), Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240), and Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1374) wrote commentaries on the master’s work.¹³ Likewise, Ibn Taymiyya’s famous student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) wrote one of the most comprehensive commentaries on the master’s *The Stages of the Wayfarers*.¹⁴ The Pīr of Herāt’s teachings on the spiritual journey have become standards in both the Persian and Arabic worlds. With regard to the entire corpus of the master, de Beaurecueil did establish a comprehensive list that includes both Farhādī’s index and other works.¹⁵

Ravan Farhādī, who wrote a short introduction to Anṣārī’s life and work, classified the books attributed to the master in four categories:

1. Works on faith, creed, sharī‘a, and tafsīr: **Kashf al-asrār* (Unveiling of the Secrets); *Dhamm al-Kalām* (Condemnation of Speculative Theology); *Takfīr al-Jahmiyya* (The Impiety of the Jahmites); *Arba ‘īn fīl-Sunna* (Forty Traditions); *Arba ‘īn fīl-Ṣifāt* (Forty Attributes of God); *Al-Farūq fīl-Ṣifāt* (The Distinction Between the Attributes of God); *Al-Qawā‘id* (The

- Fundamentals); and *Manāqib Ahmad ibn Hanbal* (The Excellent virtues of Ibn Ḥanbal).
2. Work on Ṣūfīsm: **Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Generations of the Ṣūfīs).
 3. Works on spiritual stages: **Ṣad Maydān* (The Hundred Fields), *Manāzil al-Sā’irīn* (The Stations of the Wayfarers), *‘Ilal al-Maqāmāt* (The Flaws in the Stages); **Maqūlāt-o-andarz-hā* (Sayings and Advices).
 4. Works on devotional invocations: **Munājāt* (Intimate Invocations).¹⁶

To appreciate the variety of Anṣārī’s corpus, it suffices to sample these two treatises (one in Arabic and the other in Persian): *Ṣad maydān*, *Manāzil al-sā’irīn* and the *Munājāt*, which is a collection of aphorisms. But before focusing on those works, issues surrounding the authenticity of the corpus must be discussed.

1. Questions of Authenticity

At the outset, it is important to note that though questions of authenticity are important, modern readers of ancient manuscripts should refrain from imposing their sense of authorship on the ancient texts. Our modern understanding of authorship and authority is foreign to the premodern Islamic world. Many authors dictated their work to their students. Most of Anṣārī’s biographers, de Beaurecueil included, agree that the master probably never wrote a single book with his own hands.¹⁷ His corpus is largely composed of notes and a compendium of his spiritual teachings gathered by his disciples and students. In addition, most of his teaching took place in the intimacy of his *khānqāh* (Ṣūfī lodges), where the master spent time among his disciples and family. De Beaurecueil translated the rules of the master’s *khānqāh* in a short pamphlet and remarks, “[The rules] were the expression of the ideals of loyalty, subtleness, discretion and faithfulness to the Qurān and the Sunna. In his intimate circle, Anṣārī expanded upon the lectures he gave in public.”¹⁸ There is no doubt that the master preferred oral delivery of lectures and sermons rather than writing

them down. He seems to have excelled in teaching and was renowned for his oratorical skills.

Farhādī affirms that “Anṣārī was more a teacher than a penner who wrote. His training as a student and later as a teacher of Traditions (*ḥadīth*), enhanced by his prodigious memory, enabled him to speak like a book.”¹⁹ The corpus of writings attributed to him is the fruit of his disciples’ and students’ notes and collections of his preaching and lectures on spiritual discipline and exercises. The Swedish Iranist and translator Bo Utas best captures the issue:

There is, to begin with, no doubt about his existence (...) but did he write anything (i.e., in the narrow sense of the word, excluding the more general sense of “compose,” or “formulate”)? That we cannot say. As matter of fact, not one of the works ascribed to him appears to have been written down by himself, and only one of them, his Arabic *Manāzil as-sā’irīn* (Station of the Travelers) is certain to have been dictated by him in a definitive form intended for written transmission. This was furthermore confirmed by his written *ijāzah* (authorization) in at least one of the first manuscripts.²⁰

Bo Utas had done extensive work on classical Sufism and Persian poetry and was well aware of the intractable difficulties in identifying the exact authors of important writings. Anṣārī is in good company in this matter. De Beaurecueil noted that in his final years, the master would ask his students to read their notes back to him after his lectures to check the accuracy of their collections. Earlier manuscripts of the *Manāzil* were confirmed by the master’s written *ijāza*.²¹ De Beaurecueil’s research shows clearly that *Kashf al-Asrār* (Unveiling the Mysteries), *Tabaqāt*, *Munājāt*, and many other works were compiled and edited by one or more of his disciples. The *Manāzil*, for example, was dictated after he lost his sight at the age of seventy-four.²² The master’s written *ijāza* and an affinity in writing style were important clues that allowed the Dominican friar to piece together the *Munājāt*. In *Manuscrits d’Afghanistan*, de Beaurecueil presents a comprehensive collection of the corpus attributed to the master. These

manuscripts are, in his view, largely authentic and reflect the rhetorical style and theological and spiritual teachings of the Pīr-of Herāt.

Farhādī differs and remarks that among the large collection of works attributed to him, the master did not always check systematically the accuracy of his students' notes.²³ This confirms my assumption that due caution is advised in compiling a genuine index of works attributed to the master. Surprisingly, it seems easier for scholars, particularly de Beaurecueil,²⁴ to write the biography of Anṣārī than to compile his bibliography because the latter is riddled with reliability issues.²⁵ In addition, many works were falsely attributed to him, and fragments or paraphrases of a particular book are sometimes contained in other manuscripts. The *Munājāt* are a case in point. Farhādī concludes: "In a general way, many parts of the texts found in the 15th century manuscripts can also be traced in earlier manuscripts (such as *Kashf al-Asrār* and *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*)."²⁶

Farhādī believes that two main factors explain the authenticity problems. First, some writers, calligraphers, and scribes attributed works to Anṣārī because he was a famous figure. Second, other writers simply plagiarized or imitated the master's style of writing.²⁷ N. Angha, in her research on Anṣārī's *Sad Maydan*, remarks that "in reading manuscripts related to him [Anṣārī] we come across repetitions, additions, deletions, and some revisions. Over time and through more research and study, we have come to believe that some works related to him can no longer be considered authentic."²⁸ Two examples illustrate the problem. Scholars differ concerning the master's code of Ṣūfī conduct, titled *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Ṣūfiyya*.²⁹ Angha, a scholar and a Ṣūfī, and Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī, who is arguably one of the most important Iranian scholars of Anṣāri, support the renowned Swiss Islamicist Fritz Meier (d. 1998), who wrote wide-ranging and seminal works on Sufism. Meier claims that *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Ṣūfiyya* is wrongly attributed to Anṣārī. He believes that the real author is the much later but no less famous Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221).³⁰ De Beaurecueil is joined by A. T. Karamustafa, professor at the University of Maryland College Park and Gerhard Böwering, the German-born Orientalist and professor at Yale University, in disagreeing with Meier's conclusion. Böwering admits that the master's *Ādāb al-Ṣūfiyya* appears to

be very similar to the *Ādāb al-murīdīn* ascribed by Meier to Kubrā and that the two treatises are identical word for word except for a very few details. However, he insists:

The absence of quotations from sources later than Anṣārī, the complete independence of the work from Abū an-Najīb as-Suhrawardī's *Ādāb al-murīdīn* (hardly explicable in a work by Kubrā, whose Ṣūfī affiliation is commonly traced back to Abū an-Najīb via 'Ammār al-Bidlīsī); the cross-reference to Anṣārī's *Manāzil as-Sā'irīn* within the work; the strong plea for Sunni attitudes in the Ṣūfī master that is consistent with the fervent Ḥanbalī trend of Anṣārī, yet hardly compatible with the Shiite leanings of certain Kubrāwīs; and finally the conformity of the treatise with the thought and style of Anṣārī, all suggest that the work was compiled by a direct disciple of Anṣārī and later plagiarized either by Kubrā himself or one of Kubrā's early followers.³¹

Similarly, the only surviving manuscript of *Kashf al-asrār* is Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī's (d. c. 1126) commentary based on Anṣārī's and not the master's own *Kashf al-asrār*.³² Indeed, almost forty years after the death of the master, Maybudī compiled, edited, and extended the lecture notes written down by the master's pupils on his Qur'ānic commentaries. According to Bo Utas:

Maybudī claims that he has read (*tāla 'tu*) the *Kitāb Shaix al-islam* ... 'Abda'llāh ... Anṣārī (*qaddasa llāhu rūhahu*) *fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, finding it a wonder of expression and meaning, of ornate and rhythmic prose (*tarsī'*), but also extremely concise, thus deciding to amplify it. And amplify it he did. It fills ten solid volumes in the edition of 'Alī Aşghar Hikmat.³³

Still, in a paper published at the millennium lunar anniversary of the master's birthday, de Beaurecueil lamented the careless behavior of a number of scholars who continued to attribute works to Anṣārī that are obviously not his.³⁴

Concerning the Persian dialect that the master used during his teachings, Farhādī and Angha note that *Şad maydān* was dictated in Dari-Persian or Herāti-Persian.³⁵ On the language issue, Vladimir Ivanov's article “Tabaqāt of Anṣārī in the Old Language of Herāt” is insightful and worthy of attention. This article is a meticulous philological analysis of Anṣārī's *Tabaqāt al-Şūfiyya* (the Generations of Şūfi). Ivanov's analysis traces the language of the manuscript back to eleventh-century Herāti. The author borrows the expression “the Old Language of Herāt” from Jāmī's introduction in his *Nafahāt* in reference to the eleventh-century dialect of the city of Herāt.³⁶ De Beaurecueil, Farhādī, and Angha all agree that the preface to *Şad maydān*, which reads “*Tarājim-i-Majālis-i ‘aqīda* (Introductory notes to lectures concerning the articles of faith),”³⁷ does not mean that the book was first written in Arabic and then translated into Persian. The word *tarājim* has to be understood as “records, expositions” and not as “translation.”³⁸ For his part, de Beaurecueil refers simply to the master's Persian dialect. He is interested in the significance of Anṣārī's decision to use the vernacular. He writes:

Persian was the common language of the inhabitants of Herat, and used by Anṣārī and his disciples in everyday conversation, and in supplications to God. It is a familiar and poetic idiom, not technical, but conducive to explanation for ordinary people, and suitable for heartfelt prayers. Arabic, on the contrary, is the sacred language of the Qurān and Islamic sciences including Sufism with its technical vocabulary, precision of thought, and the mode of communication among scholars in the entire Islamic world, regardless of ethnic background. Therefore, in *The Hundred Fields*, Anṣārī had in mind his close entourage and in *The Deficiencies of the Stages*, the readership is much larger, people from Herat and beyond. Precise definitions would replace mere translations or brief description of Arabic expressions. Subtle analysis in which each word has a value would replace vague descriptions or loose comparisons which often lack rigor.³⁹

Another issue is that, over time, many versions of works attributed to Anṣārī were discovered, such as several versions of *'Ilāhī nāma*, *Munājāt*,

Sad maydān, *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*. Also, multiple versions of his sayings, poems, and manuscripts are scattered all over the Persian and Arabic world. De Beaurecueil worked on manuscripts located in Kabul, Bombay, London, Paris, Tehran, and Istanbul.⁴⁰ In his series of *Anṣārīyyāt* published in the *BIFAO*,⁴¹ he devoted an article to the question of manuscripts. Painstakingly, he went through all the manuscripts available at the time and evaluated their authenticity and relevance. His article shows how dexterous and skillful he had become in editing manuscripts.⁴² It is no wonder that when de Beaurecueil opened his *Maison d'Abraham* in Kabul and gave up hunting and editing manuscripts, his Dominican brother Georges Anawati and many of his colleagues thought it was a waste of talents and a loss of erudite scholarship on Anṣārī's work.⁴³

At any rate, de Beaurecueil's scholarship has sought to sort out the authenticity question and arrive at a reliable catalog of books attributed to the master. His annotated and translated works have largely cleared the confusion. Apart from some minor mistakes in his early bibliography of Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil gives readers an appendix of accurate works, including poems and sayings.⁴⁴ Hellmut Ritter, a German scholar of Persian literature and mysticism and author of *Das Meer Seele* (The Ocean of Soul), the voluminous book on Farid al-din ‘Attar, pays tribute to de Beaurecueil's pioneering and groundbreaking research on the master of Herat. Ritter writes, “A work of such magnitude is a lifetime endeavor. It is time consuming and demands patience ... We could, however, understand the feat of those who embark on such a painstaking research.”⁴⁵ A clear example of de Beaurecueil's investment is best appreciated in his *Manuscrits d'Afghanistan* published in 1964, which was the fruit of two visits to Afghanistan in 1955 and 1962.⁴⁶ During both visits, de Beaurecueil collected 1,596 manuscripts from the private library of the last King of Afghanistan, M. Zāher Shāh, and from five other public libraries, including the Kabul Museum, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Public Education, the Herāt Museum, and the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Kabul.⁴⁷ This overview of the body of work attributed to Anṣārī demonstrates the place that the master holds in the mystical tradition and imagination of the Persian world. Let us turn to a few masterpieces attributed to the Pīr of Herāt to appreciate their spiritual acumen.

2. Two Spiritual Treatises: The Hundred Fields and The Stages of the Wayfarers

Beginners on the spiritual path are often in dire need of precise and well-defined stages and stations. It comes as no surprise that in the mystical tradition of Islam, there are many works that try to answer such needs.⁴⁸ The three treatises under consideration fall squarely within this purview. The Pīr of Herāt was not a theoretician of the mystical path but one who lived it and taught students and novices the stages and pitfalls of the spiritual journey. The form, content, and spiritual doctrines of the master's treatises were mostly influenced by the writings of Abū Sa‘īd Kharrāz's (d. 899) *Kitāb al-ṣidq* (The Book of Spiritual Authenticity) and Abū Mansūr al-İsfahānī's (d. 1107) *Risāla nahj al-khāss* (The Path of the Privileged). But de Beaurecueil and Farhādī believe that among these masters, the most influential work on Anṣārī was Abū Mansūr al-İsfahānī's.⁴⁹ Indeed, in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, the master speaks highly of al-İsfahānī, calling him “the Imām of the esoteric sciences and the sciences of divine reality, the paragon of his age, unique among Masters.”⁵⁰ Anṣārī also refers explicitly to other seminal Ṣūfī masters such as ‘Ubayd al-Baṣrī (d. 761), Dhū l-Nūn Miṣrī (d. 860), Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 874)⁵¹, Junayd Baghdādī (d. 910), and Abū Bakr al-Kattānī (d. 934).⁵²

In his treatises, Anṣārī sought to systematize the mystical journey. Even though these treatises differ in terms of language (Persian and Arabic), literary genre, the circumstances and period of composition, and the extent of their influence, they nevertheless shed light on each other. Thus, it is crucial to compare them to grasp their spiritual intelligence. In these spiritual teachings, the master addressed morality (*akhlāq*) and good conduct (*adab*) as well as chivalry (*futuwwa*) and magnanimity (*muruwwa*).⁵³ He underscored spiritual discipline, devotion, and above all a strict respect to the divine path. As a Ṣūfī and a Ḥanbalī in theology,⁵⁴ Anṣārī relies only on the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and as a literary genius, he weaves verses of the Qur'ān and ḥadīths together to craft a mosaic of rhymed and rhythmic prose, beautiful to recite and easy to remember. Hence, the references to the sacred book and the prophetic tradition are not epiphenomena, but they confer religious value and authenticity to his

thought.⁵⁵ In the preface of *Manāzil*, the master goes through the entire chain of transmission (*isnād*) of a number of ḥadīth cited to prove the dependability and reliability of his sources.⁵⁶ Likewise, his spirituality is based on the sacred texts. Angha makes an astute remark concerning the master's view of the relationship between Ṣūfism and Sharī'ah. She did not see a conflict for Anṣārī between Hanbali legalism and the mystical path. She wrote:

To him [Anṣārī] the divine law is the foundation of understanding and awareness of the divine truth, and the divine truth is expressed in the divine law, and the seeker is to understand and obey both on the path towards understanding the reality of God. His Ḥanbalīsm and his devotion to the Qur'ān and ḥadīth is expressed in every detail of his teachings, and his mystical teachings are also expressed in every detail of *Ṣad maydān*. They exist not in opposition to each other but in harmony.⁵⁷

Similarly, de Beaurecueil, in his “*Présentation d'Anṣārī*,” notes that for Anṣārī, there is no internal contradiction or duplicity between Hanbalism and Sufism. His personality and works testify to both his Sufism and his Hanbalism.⁵⁸ The spiritual life and the mystical experience go hand in hand with the observation of the demands of the religion. For Anṣārī, Ṣūfīsm is Islam lived more deeply, and a good Muslim should be a Ṣūfī and a Ṣūfī should be a good Muslim. He teaches: “The Reality is entirely the Law. The Law is the foundation of the Reality. The Law without the Reality is useless, and the Reality without the Law is useless. Those who act without these two are (themselves) useless.”⁵⁹

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil's attachment and reverence for the master lie primarily in the following remarks. Anṣārī's mystical thought and spiritual teachings sought to preserve the tension between a strict respect for the Qur'ān and the Sunna on the one hand and their inner meaning (*istinbat*) on the other. In his *Kashf al-asrār* (*Unveiling the Mystery/Secret*), Rachid al- Dīn al- Maybūdī tried to bring together the exoteric (outer meaning) and esoteric (inner meaning) exegesis of the Qur'ān already present in the master's commentary.⁶⁰ On this note, it is important to

remark that commentators on Anṣārī’s works are multiple and varied. The master’s admirers are found among both Ibn ‘Arabī’s as well as Ibn Taymiyya’s students.⁶¹ In both *Şad maydān* and *Manāzil*, Anṣārī is aware of the differences in aptitude and varying dispositions of his students. He teaches his disciples to grow in spiritual matters step by step. His methodology is not new, but his poetic style makes the stages easy to memorize.

De Beaurecueil was not only a scholar of Anṣārī’s work; he was also a student and disciple of the master’s mystical teachings. He did not hesitate to incorporate parts of the master’s aphorisms, sayings, and poems into his own liturgical worship. His liturgical celebration (Eucharist and the Hours) in Kabul features many sayings of the *Munājāt*. These aphorisms or monologues with God nourished his spiritual imagination and helped shape his daily *horarium*. For example:

O God

To converse with your friends is like cool water on the soul.

To converse with others than them is torment to the soul.

Concerning *Şad maydān* and *Manāzil*, they served as stages or dwelling places on the spiritual journey. In so many ways, de Beaurecueil’s endeavor is comparable to the work of an iconographer in Orthodox Christian tradition. Writing (instead of painting) an icon was not just an act of art but a prayer. This master-teacher conversation was the nourishing ground on which the Dominican friar’s life as a religious and a priest rested in the land of Islam. He seemed to have reconciled his Dominican spirituality of *contemplari aliis tradere* (contemplate and share the fruit of one’s contemplation) with the master’s spiritual vision. It is no surprise that the *Munājāt* were at his bedside in his final days in France. De Beaurecueil’s work offered a systematic reading of the master’s spiritual thought. The two treatises that are the subject of our study are famous for their insight, style, and spiritual wisdom.

A parallel reading of *Şad Maydān* (the Hundred Fields) and *Manāzil* (The Stages of the Wayfarers) shows Anṣārī’s own spiritual development and maturity. Most of de Beaurecueil’s effort to understand the master’s spiritual teaching lies in these two treatises. Anṣārī dictated *Şad maydān* at the age of fifty, around the years 1056–57,⁶² twenty-two years after his

samā‘ experience in Nūbadhān, which led to a decision to forsake drunken mysticism once and for all.⁶³ The master dictated his work at a point where he had enjoyed almost twelve years of serene life without trials of exile or prison. During this time of reprieve, he devoted his energy to teaching and particularly to his commentary on the Qur’ān. For example, the backdrop of the *Şad Maydān* was his commentary on Q.3:31: “Say: if you love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins.”⁶⁴

In 1082, twenty-six years later, the master revised, expanded, and retitled his previous work from *Kitāb Şad Maydān* to *Kitāb Manāzil al-Sā’irīn*. By that time, he was blind and had only seven years to live. The *Manāzil* finally answered a persistent request of his students and followers in Herāt and Balkh to rework his earlier treatise and correct its failures and inconsistencies. This second treatise, written in Arabic, was the master’s ultimate spiritual gift to posterity. There was a difference not only in structure but also in the content. The master introduced each station with a related Qur’ānic verse with remarkable care. The differences in structure and content, however, confirm a general progress in his spiritual thought and reinforced the spiritual connection between *Kitāb Şad Maydān* and *Kitāb Manāzil al-Sā’irīn*.

In both treatises, the master is aware that spiritual growth differs from one student to another, and he insists on God’s absolute freedom to impede or increase spiritual progress. The images and terms used are designed to reveal and describe the “fields” and “stages or stations.” His use of chapters suggests a dynamic character of the spiritual path.⁶⁵ The term “station (*maqām*) signifies that which may be attained by control and may be realized through seeking hardship and suffering, and the station (*manzil*) may be considered as a stopping place for training.”⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, the master does not use the word *maqām* (*demeure, dwelling*) in either of the titles of his major treatises; he prefers *maydān* (fields) and *manāzil* (stations). De Beaurecueil finds this choice significant: Anṣārī would speak of The Hundred Fields (*maydān*), a neutral expression referring to an exercise ground and a battlefield.⁶⁷ As Angha observes, however, in *Şad Maydān*, the master at times uses dwelling (*maqām*) and station (*manzil*) as synonymous terms and does not oppose or differentiate them.⁶⁸ As the master teaches in the preface, “each of these thousand dwelling places is a stage for travelers and a dwelling place for those who stop.”⁶⁹

De Beaurecueil and Angha have examined in detail the differences in terms of vocabulary, structure, and classification of stages, citations, definitions, and descriptions of the terms between the two treatises.⁷⁰ Angha notes that “*Şad Maydān* and *Manāzil* have fifty-one stations in common and differ in forty-nine stations.”⁷¹ De Beaurecueil adds that even though the two treatises stem from the same author and share many features, the differences are obvious. He writes about *Manāzil*:

[T]he introduction announces a strict structure (ten sections which are sub-divided in ten chapters, and analyzed on three levels), the list of terms studies is not the same, their position on the spiritual path has changed as well as the Quranic citations which introduced them. The definitions of terms are rigorous, the analysis leaves little room to fantasy, the comparisons are discrete, and the eloquence is measured.⁷²

According to Angha, the master sought in *Şad Maydān* to lead wayfarers to God or to attain proximity with God (*qurb*).⁷³ Each field follows a standard structure: definition and description of the field, a ranking of the class of wayfarers, and a grouping of the attributes of each station.⁷⁴ According to Anṣārī, there are three types of people on the spiritual journey: “They are people of spiritual realization and verification (*ahl-i tāhqīq*), or those who have listened to God and are enraptured by the divine ecstasy (*ahl-i samā'*), finally, there are the people of self-delusion who claim that they do know (*ahl-al da'wā*).”⁷⁵ The master dwells on the qualifications of the three groups and teaches that the first group is the ‘ārif, those who know and have discovered the knowledge of the spiritual path, and the divine light illuminates their hearts. The second group refers to people of ecstatic rapture (*ahl -i samā'*). This group is mentioned in field number eighty-seven of *Şad Maydān*. They have found illumination through the experience of hearing God’s word and commands (*amr*). The last group pretends to have spiritual knowledge but is in self-delusion (*ahl-al da'wa*).⁷⁶ Likewise in the *Manāzil*, the master classifies the wayfarers in three groups: the *murīd* (disciples), *murād* (masters), and impostors (*da'wi kunanda*).⁷⁷ In the master’s own words:

Indeed, on the spiritual path there are three types of wayfarers: first, a person who acts, but is torn between fear and hope and is inclined toward love without modesty—that is the *murīd*. The second is a person who is pulled from the places of distraction towards the valley of concentration on God—that is the *murād*. Third, a person who is neither the first nor the second is an impostor who lures others into temptation and seduction.⁷⁸

The master also classifies the dwelling places (*manāzil*) as follows:

For your sake, I distinguish the levels of each dwelling places in order that you know the level of the common person, and then the level of the advanced and finally the level of the Realized. Each one of them has a rule for the itinerary, a path and a direction assigned to them.⁷⁹

Angha relies on the view of another important Iranian scholar of Anṣārī’s work, Savar Mullā’ī, to show the place of *Ṣad Maydān* in the Persian world. She declares, “This treatise is one of the most important and carefully systematized esoteric masterpieces ever written in Persian on the stages and stations of the spiritual journey. It represents not only Anṣārī’s logical and analytical mind but also his poetic and literary style on describing the stages and stations of the inner journey,”⁸⁰ and she adds that the *Ṣad Maydān* is “written in a rhythmic prose literary form similar to poetry with a calculated beat.”⁸¹ There is no doubt that Anṣārī’s literary skills and poetic talents contributed to the success and popularity of his spiritual teachings. De Beaurecueil puts *Ṣad Maydān* in context: “The book is [a] compilation of notes taken by a disciple (or by many given [that] there are various versions and manuscripts) during the master’s oral lectures where he let his inspiration of the moment lead him.”⁸² *Ṣad Maydān* begins with repentance (*tawba*) and concludes with the field of subsistence in God (*baqā’*). The master adds another stage, love (*mahabba*), which is the sublimation and unification of all the hundred fields.

De Beaurecueil does recognize that the two treatises are not equal in literary quality and spiritual acumen. “[I]n the series of teaching on the spiritual path, the *Hundred Fields* offers just a rough draft, because during

his sermons the master was available to sustain freely his arguments by answering his audience's questions. The book needs not to be asked to offer more than it has.”⁸³ Bo Utas agrees and calls *Şad Maydān* “a Persian sketch of the *Manāzil*.”⁸⁴ De Beaurecueil’s earlier remark is well taken because many scholars would lament part of the structural problem and inconsistencies in *Şad Maydān*.⁸⁵ Angha notes that in *The Hundred Fields*, stations follow each other without a solid organizing structure to bind them in a coherent manner. Some fields do not follow the three-by-three schemes —a definition of the field, a ranking of the classes of the wayfarers, and a grouping of the attribute of each station.⁸⁶ In conclusion, de Beaurecueil notes:

The *Hundred Fields* with its imprecision and unevenness is wanting at times, and it is normal that the book leaves us unsatisfied. The *Hundred Fields* was a mere compilation of lecture notes. It would have been different to hear Anṣārī teaching his disciples. Some chapters are, however, marvelous, such as, annihilation and subsistence in God (chapters 99 and 100). The power of their conciseness is unmatched.⁸⁷

The inconsistencies and failures in structure and organization contained in *Şad maydān* are corrected in *Manāzil*.⁸⁸ In this latter spiritual manual, the master states clearly the reasons for his endeavor. His thought has evolved from a moralistic perspective to a focus on the mystical path. The structural difference and the shift in classification both point to an evolution in the master’s own understanding of spiritual stages and their importance. Hence, the *Manāzil* is a revised and polished version of *Şad maydān* with a reordering of the fields and the suppression of a few others. Farhādī corroborates this view and lays out the structure of the treatise. He notes:

If there is a classical Ṣūfī treatise with a clear structure, it is this work. [Its features are:]

1. Dictated in Arabic by Anṣārī who, by then, was blind.
2. The book contains a preface and an introduction.

3. And has ten sections (*abwāb*). Each section contains ten chapters, and each chapter presents a “station” or *manzil*. An epilogue, which is at the end of the Hundredth Station is the Unification (*tawhīd*).⁸⁹

This clear structure, however, would change between the two treatises. In the first treatise, the master starts with *tawba* (return to God) and ends with *maḥabba* (love); the second treatise starts with *yaqaza* (awakening) and concludes with *tawhīd* (Unification).⁹⁰ Angha, in her study of *Ṣad Maydān*, shows clearly the difference in structure and classification of both treatises.⁹¹ The originality of this treatise (1082) reflects the master’s own spiritual maturity through trials (prison and exile). There are a hundred *maqāmāt* divided into ten groups or sections, which are *bidāyāt* (Beginnings), *abwāb* (Doors), *mu‘āmalāt* (Actions), *akhlāq* (Virtues), *uṣūl* (Principles), *awdiya* (Valleys), *aḥwāl* (Spiritual States), *wilāyāt* (Guardianship), *haqā’iq* (Realities), and *nihāyāt* (Fulfillments).⁹² In addition, each *maqām* or station has three stages of realization (*darajāt*). With a few exceptions, the master remains faithful to the structure. The three-to-three schemes are maintained with absolute rigor through the hundred stages. The introduction gives crucial clues to the goal of and reasons for the treatise. The book is an answer to students and disciples in Herat and Balkh. Anṣārī explains in his own words why he wrote the book:

A group of those who are interested in the path of the wayfarers toward God, the meek people of Herat and beyond, asked me years ago to offer a short exposé on the subject matter, which would serve as lampposts on the spiritual journey. I granted their request with this book, after invoking God’s help and guidance. The people begged me to present these stages in a manner that shows their order of succession, and to point to the relations between them, but to leave out other masters’ sayings for conciseness sake in order that the book is delightful to read and easy to memorize.⁹³

In addition, the significance of *Manāzil* is reflected in the number of commentaries on the treatise in both the Arab and Persian worlds. These

commentaries cover a range of schools of thought from the followers of ibn ‘Arabi to the disciples of Ibn Taymiyya.⁹⁴ In the words of Caspar:

The influence of this *shaikh al-Islam* was considerable, a fact to which the numerous commentaries on his writings testify. More remarkable still is the fact that these commentaries represent a wide range of tendencies extending from the monists (disciples of Ibn ‘Arabī) such as Shams al-Dīn al-Tustarī to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, the impetuous disciple of Ibn Taymiyya. His influence appears still to exist in our time, for one can find in Cairo recent editions of the Book of Stages and the commentaries of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.⁹⁵

The broad ranging commentaries proved the influence of the treatise among the unlikely school of mysticism. This attraction is due to the fact that the master’s spiritual path was not rigid and unyielding, but he crafted a flexible and dynamic structure suitable to wayfarers’ spiritual experiences. *Sad Maydān* and *Manāzil* are not linear classifications of spiritual stages, but spiritual road maps with stages that were simple to follow and to remember. The main reasons for the treatises were didactic and mnemonic. After all, the spiritual path depends on the student’s discipline and God’s grace.⁹⁶ The master refers in the preface of *Sad Maydān* to Abū ‘Ubayd al-Baṣrī’s observation: “God grants to some of his servants the privilege of tasting, at the beginning of their spiritual journey, the fruits of the ultimate stages.”⁹⁷

These various interpretations were valuable sources for de Beaurecueil, and he depended on them to craft his own understanding. He noted that Kāshānī and Darguzinī were ingenious interpreters, while Ibn al-Qayyim offered a courageous critical reading. Anṣārī is indeed a master, and his work is pregnant with insight, with something that remains to be developed or needs to be unfolded and unpacked. His mystical intuition expresses well the ineffable experience of an encounter with God. One could conjecture differences in poetic possibilities between writing in Persian dialect and in formal Arabic; however, de Beaurecueil and others scholars do not see a dramatic influence due to the language shift. The real impact of *Manāzil*, written in Arabic, is the conciseness and precision of the

terms. In addition, the latter treatise profits from theological and mystical technical terms in Arabic plus expands his readership above and beyond the Persian world of *Şad maydān*.

Finally, let us examine the style or literary devices of these treatises. Apart from the similarity in organization between *Şad Maydān* and *Manāzil*, the master utilizes a common literary device. Angha believes that Anṣārī borrows the simplicity of the Sāmānid̄s' literary style along with the complexity of the Ghaznavids' and Saljūks' approach. The master tends to avoid unnecessary words and verb repetition in rhymed prose. According to Angha, these mystical treatises were collected at a time when the Ghaznavids and later the Seljuks favored and encouraged the development of mystical writing.⁹⁸ Most of the master's treatises are built in the same format, following an eleventh-century literary style of *saj'*.⁹⁹ Angha defines the style as follows:

Saj' rhyming and rhythmic prose is a literary style between poetry and prose. It does not entirely follow the restricted technique of poetry nor does it follow the free style of prose. It includes rhythm, its phrases usually consist of three to four words, phrases have similar beats, and certain words or letters are repeated in every phrase.¹⁰⁰

... [T]he literary style of *saj'* in *Şad maydān* is composed with such a thoughtful calculation that reader must dwell on each phrase in order to understand his point and be able to discover the meaning that links the ideas together.¹⁰¹

Indeed, the *saj'* literary style in these spiritual treatises is designed to capture readers' attention and bring them to a still point. According to Wheeler Thackston, one of the most significant American scholars of Persian literature and Sufism and Qur'ānic studies, "the use of internal rhyme at pausal point, a device known as *saj'*, encountered throughout the Qur'ān and common in Arabic and Persian literary style, gives these sentences an extraordinary rhythmical fluidity and cadence."¹⁰² Devin Steward, associate professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Emory University, is in agreement with Thackson. His important article "Saj ' in the Qur'an: Prosody and Structure" supports Thackson's argument.¹⁰³

Novices and students on the spiritual path are invited to linger on each line or phrase to understand and grasp the undergirding ideas. Even though the phrases are short and seem simple and concise, the underlying message is complex and sometimes difficult to follow. The master's use of rhyme and rhythm are deployed to awaken in the reader the esoteric understanding of the spiritual stages and stations. As literary masterpieces, these treatises have stood the test of time and inspired many other mystics because of the depth of the message. These treatises represent the master's astute choice of words and unparalleled use of rhythm and rhyme.

For his part, Farhādī, under the rubric "Stylistic Features of *The Hundred Grounds*,"¹⁰⁴ explains the master's method of composition. He remarks that his approach was entirely practical with the underlying goal of being "didactic and homiletic, designed to guide his student-novices in the memorization of difficult subjects."¹⁰⁵ The master used three main techniques of memorization in the mnemonic tradition of *The Hundred Grounds*: first, "Eloquent and vigorous expression in the form of aphorisms, adages, maxims, and precepts," and, second, "parallel ends and internal rhyme or a *saj'* (rhymed prose with rhymes recurring by way of consonance or assonance, at parallel points in a sentence)," and, third, the "Itemization into ternary form of the treatise's subject-matter or ideas."¹⁰⁶

Even though *Manāzil* is a mature work and profits from the literary and technical genius of the Arabic language, the first field (*tawba*) in *Ṣad maydān*, in our view, captures best the *saj'* rhyming and rhythmic prose and the master's mnemonic and didactic style. De Beaurecueil's French translation is much more poetic than the English versions of Angha, Mughal, and Farhādī.¹⁰⁷ A sample gives us a better grasp of spiritual lessons turn into poetic utterances in *saj'* form:

The 2nd Field: Magnanimity (*muruwwat*)

From the field of Repentance the field of Magnanimity is generated. Magnanimity means being humble and living with poverty, as God Most High says: "Stand out firmly for justice" (Q.4:135).

Magnanimity has three cornerstones: living wisely and intelligently with oneself, living with patience with people, and

living in need of God.

The indications of living wisely with oneself are three things: knowing one's worth (*qadr*), evaluating and realizing the limits of what one can do, and striving to improve oneself.

The signs of living patiently with people are three things: being satisfied and content with people according to their respective capacities, accepting and understanding their apologies, and being fair to them to the best of your ability.

The signs of living in need of God are in three things: considering it incumbent upon oneself to be thankfully grateful for whatever one receives from God, considering it incumbent upon oneself to apologize for whatever deeds one does for God's sake, and accepting God's will as rightful and best for oneself.¹⁰⁸

This erudition of the master's three treatises shows the insight, wisdom, and sagacity of his spiritual teachings. De Beaurecueil's choice to title the translation of these three treatises *Chemin de Dieu* (Path to the Divine) reveals his own understanding of them. These treatises are spiritual guidebooks for wayfarers on their paths to God, and above all, the texts try to articulate and keep track of the ineffable experience of an encounter with God. Anṣārī's choice to dictate his *Şad maydān* in a local Persian dialect made it a forerunner in Persian mystical manuals. His poetic style of rhythmic and rhymed prose, the *saj'* literary style, and his three-scheme structure for mnemonic and didactic purposes struck a chord in de Beaurecueil's spiritual thought. Angha remarks, "The poetic style of the rhyming prose he [Anṣārī] employed in *Şad maydān* was to usher in a new literary style in Persian literature, soon to be followed by Ṣūfī writers and sages such as Sā‘dī of Shīrāz"¹⁰⁹ in his *Gulistān*.¹¹⁰ Notwithstanding *Manazīl*'s mature and refined nature, *Şad maydān* remains decisive in terms of language, readership, and context.

Furthermore, the master's teachings offer a holistic approach to the spiritual path. He divides the way to God in stages, stations, or fields; he ranks the disciples in terms of novice, advanced, and privileged; and finally he calls the wayfarers to be attentive to the deficiencies and pitfalls of the stations. He addresses inner thought and outer behavior; he explains the level of knowledge and interaction between novices and outsiders. The Pīr of Herāt seems to have combined in his treatises the qualities of a number

of Ḥanafī masters, such as Qushayrī’s penchant for fine psychological analysis and his deep understanding of the experiences of the mystical wayfarers from the novice (*murīd*) to the master (*shaykh*), Sahl al-Tustarī’s erudite mystical hermeneutic, the moral insights of Muḥāsibī, and the scriptural authority of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj.¹¹¹

In his presentation of the master’s treatises, de Beaurecueil finds almost no fault with the corpus beyond a few minor qualms. This veneration and master-student conversation sustained his theological endeavor and fueled his mystical interest and scholarship. Unlike Massignon, de Beaurecueil did not equate the Pīr of Herāt with any great figure in the Christian tradition and did not elevate Anṣārī to a position unknown in Islamic mystical history. At the same time, no one could deny that he, like many Western scholars of Islamic mysticism with zeal, passion, and admiration for a single figure, often was led to overlook other important Ṣūfīs and exaggerate the place of his master. De Beaurecueil’s choice to uphold one mystic above all others and dedicate a lifetime of scholarship to the Pīr of Herāt is a case in point, even though the Dominican friar believed that his trajectory was largely providential.

Likewise, his Dominican and Catholic faith plays a prominent role in his hermeneutic of the master’s work and life. He shares with Massignon a similar religious intuition born in the intimacy of their faith and mystical experience in the land of Islam. In the face of incompatible tenets of faith between Islam and Christianity and the impossibility of reconciling them, both seem to have chosen the seminal character of the patriarch Abraham as the pivotal figure. De Beaurecueil not only exemplified for them the primordial link between the two religions, but most unequivocally Abraham embodied the notion of mystical substitution on behalf of the other (his prayer for Lot and the city of Sodom and Gomorrah), his hospitality (to God’s messengers), and his compassion.¹¹² In both the Qur’ānic and Biblical texts, the patriarch Abraham is revered for his hospitality to the strangers who visited him and turned out to be God’s messengers. Abraham is the prime example of a host for Massignon and de Beaurecueil.

At any rate, no thorough investigation of de Beaurecueil’s scholarship on Anṣārī’s life and work could afford to neglect the collection of intimate conversations with God, which made the master famous and popular all

over the Muslim world, particularly in the Persian countries. Hence, the third section of this chapter examines the *Munājāt*.

II. The *Munājāt* or *Cris du cœur*

There is no better introduction to the *Munājāt* than de Beaurecueil's own observation:

The *Munājāt*, these outpourings of feelings, violent, enthusiastic, and sometime reproachful of what is in and on one's heart, contain prayers, advice, and intimate thought. Very popular, these *Munājāt* (*cris du cœur*) have reached beyond the immediate circles of Sufis, in order to feed ordinary believer's prayers ...

Composed in *saj'*—a genre of prose with scant assonances—these *cris du cœur* try to convey an unfathomable spiritual experience.¹¹³

According to Farhādī, *Munājāt* mean “intimate and confidential conversations,” “intimate invocations to God,” or “sincere and opened-hearted prayers.”¹¹⁴ On his part, Wheeler Thackston speaks of “intimate conversation with someone.”¹¹⁵ Annabel Keeler, researcher at the Faculty of Asia and Middle Eastern Studies (Cambridge University) and expert in Ṣūfī hermeneutics, prefers “intimate prayer and communing with God.”¹¹⁶ The aphorisms and sayings in the *Munājāt* constitute a passionate yet private and familiar monologue with God.¹¹⁷ It is de Beaurecueil, however, who captures best the spirit of these intimate conversations. He remarks that “confidence” is too polished and “*oraison*” too reminiscent of prayer; he prefers *cris du cœur*. He explains that “their often violent, enthusiastic or reproachful tone prompted me to entitle them *cris du cœur*.¹¹⁸ These intimate conversations with God are the Pīr of Herāt's spiritual and poetic *chef-d'œuvre*. They have maintained an unprecedented level of popularity among rich and poor, Ṣūfīs and ordinary believers, and have served as lyrics for songs and a cash crop for many calligraphers and scribes throughout the centuries. In Herāt, the birthplace of the master, they are as popular as the Qur’ān itself.¹¹⁹

If the *Sad maydān* and *Manāzil* are famous for their mnemonic and didactic acumen, the *Munājāt* are celebrated for their literary beauty and striking spiritual wisdom. These aphorisms and phrases are the fruit of deep spiritual experiences and mystical inclinations. Schimmel, in her preface to Danner's and Thackston's translations of *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s Ḥikam* and *Anṣārī’s Munājāt*, writes, “[T]he brevity of both *Ḥikam* and *Munājāt* proves the immense self-control of the mystics who were able to condense their deepest feelings and their loftiest experiences in small, gemlike, perfectly polished sayings.”¹²⁰ These “gemlike, perfectly polished sayings” were used as prayers for their artistic quality, their exquisite wisdom, and the spiritual comfort they bestow on wayfarers. De Beaurecueil sees a connection between the language of the texts and the intensity and depth of their messages. He writes, “[T]hese *Munājāt* are made of prayers and comments in rhymed prose, in addition, the music of the language matches the depth of the thought.”¹²¹

In its Persian rhyming prose and rhythmic quatrains, the *Munājāt* speak of the wisdom of a searching and at times disheartened and yet hopeful mystic. According to W. Thackston, “Anṣārī speaks of his love, and longing in abject, human frailty vis à vis God’s omnipotence.”¹²² Readers meet a Ṣūfī shaykh “who pours out his feelings in the presence of the Lord like little sighs, for the rhythm of these prayers is like breathing in its constant change of contraction and expansion.”¹²³ These intimate prayers became the companion of de Beaurecueil in good and sad times. He would comment on, rely on, and take comfort in the most exquisite sayings. He would agree with Schimmel that the *Munājāt* “offer a perfect code of life: complete trust in God, deep faith in His grace and awareness of His justice, and an insight into His mysterious working through the contrasting manifestation of this created world.”¹²⁴ These luminous aphorisms bring together superb poetic skills and transcend time, culture, faith traditions, and even language.

1. Textual History

More than any other work attributed to the master, the textual history of the *Munājāt* is very problematic. There is no or little textual continuity between the master’s original text and the edited copies known to scholars today.¹²⁵

Thackston best summarizes the situation: “It is probably safe to say that no two printed versions of the *Munājāt* agree with regard to the material included. Some are significantly longer; others markedly whittled down.”¹²⁶ These collections seriously challenge our modern understanding of authorship. The popularity of the *Munājāt* was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the text is found in superb calligraphic and ornamented manuscripts, and these popular and commercial pamphlets are scattered all over both the Persian and Arab worlds. But on the other hand, their popularity led to multiple editions and corrections by successive scribes and calligraphers. In the words of Bo Utas: “After all, these changes in the textual tradition show to what extent the texts have been alive all through the nine centuries that have passed since the death of Anṣārī.”¹²⁷

In the introduction to his translation of the *Munājāt*, Thackston observes that if one judges by content alone, irrespective of style, some parts of the book cannot be ascribed to the master but to elements common to later mystical thought.¹²⁸ On the basis of the surviving manuscripts of works such as *Sad maydān* and *Tabaqāt al-Šūfiyya*, de Beaurecueil concludes that the master dictated and taught in Herāti. Anṣārī’s *Munājāt* share with a few other famous works the problem of authenticity. For example, the so-called “wandering quatrains” of ‘Umar Khayyām are probably the most famous case in point.¹²⁹ The multiplicity of copies and manuscripts makes it almost impossible to trace the original text. Speaking about the *Munājāt*, Thackston remarks that:

The dialectal peculiarities, however, have been normalized by successive copyists and redactors, who, typical of premodern litterateurs on the Perso-Arabic tradition, did not hesitate to make corrections, and emendations, not to speak of additions, in accordance with their personal taste. The result is a collection of prose sentences, characteristically rhymed, the ascription of which to the Pīr of Herāt rests on a certain historical basis but to which later accretions have adhered.¹³⁰

Bo Utas describes in detail the difficulty of ascertaining the continuity in the textual tradition of the *Munājāt* in his article and notes that in the case of Anṣārī, the question of authorship is even more complicated. He

concludes: “Generally there is only partial, or no, continuity to hold on to in the bewildering mass of material. These texts have, no doubt, grown and changed incessantly during the centuries.”¹³¹ De Beaurecueil echoes Bo Utas’s concern and explains further his methodological approach to maintaining continuity in the textual tradition of the *Munājāt*:

In the Arab world, Anṣārī is famous for his *Stages of the Wayfarers*, but in the Persian world is celebrated for his *Munājāt*. Over the centuries, the *Munājāt* have often changed their complexion and have also snowballed. In order to avoid presenting beautiful and yet unreliable excerpts, we decided to stick to a few passages cited in the *Generation of the Sufis*. The style and thinking pattern are difficult, but they reflect admirably the character, thought and talent of the master. Neither literature nor prettiness, but the experience seeks to couch itself in rhythm, rhyme and images by successive waves, in more intimate manner than didactic works. This is where one must go to meet Anṣārī.¹³²

Interestingly enough, the collection of the *Munājāt* as we know it today has been expanded and contracted by various copyists who managed to improve the texts. These various scribes cleared frequent archaic words, phrases, idioms, and expressions from the early compositions that had made some passages difficult for readers to understand with regard “to phonetics, morphology and semantics.”¹³³ As Thackston observes, “if we were to edit out all that is obviously not the words of Khwāja ‘Abdullāh, we would lose much of value and beauty.”¹³⁴ Also, if we abandon anachronism in terms of authorship and realize that in oral culture memorization is thought to be more reliable than writing, modern readers might avoid sterile criticism of the textual authenticity of the *Munājāt*. Hence, it would be wise to recognize a certain authenticity to most of the manuscripts, even the later ones, and not dismiss them altogether.

Nonetheless, the changes in the textual tradition are nothing compared to the damage resulting from the translation from Persian to European languages, as many translators bemoaned. The rhymed prose of these intimate conversations is the main reason for their great popularity in the Persian-speaking world, and as Farhādī puts it, “The aesthetic and

psychological effects of such assonance are, unfortunately, lost in translation.”¹³⁵ Both Thackston and de Beaurecueil lament the impossibility of translating the *saj'* literary style and many peculiar Persian idiomatic expressions into English or French. Thackston writes:

Anṣārī’s sentences appear to be the essence of stylistic simplicity, yet masked by the brevity and conciseness of expression is a considerable amount of subtle rhetorical play. The parallelism and internal rhyme characteristic of so many of the prose sentences are devices impossible to recapture in translation. Extensive use is made of the rhetorical device known as *tarsī*, where the sequence of vowels in two or more parallel lines is exactly the same, with only the consonants varying.¹³⁶

2. Literary and Spiritual Acumen

In his French translation based on reliable manuscripts and not on commercial pamphlets, de Beaurecueil notes that Anṣārī proceeds like both a painter and a musician by successive touches and the unfolding of the melody.¹³⁷ The images used by the master are related to a number of major themes: journey, light, water, vegetation, fire, commerce and gain, life and death, suffering and illness, joy and feast, the Royal Court, food and drink, justice, war, lamentation, and tears.¹³⁸ There are also other less important, isolated themes or images used sporadically by the master, such as, guilt, breath, smell, touch, and so forth.¹³⁹ The study of these images and themes led de Beaurecueil to conclude, “If one compares the images that were just listed to those in the *Stages of the Wayfarers*, the coincidence is striking. The major themes are identical: journey, light and water linked to vegetation. Such an affinity testifies in favor of the authenticity of our selections.”¹⁴⁰

The master’s thought focuses on searching for and finding God, the divine decree and its consequences, the love of God, the memory of God, the friends of God, and the question “Who am I?” repeated many times as a leitmotif.¹⁴¹ These aspects anchor his teachings in a constant effort to describe for his disciples the subtle yet powerful intimate relationship between God and the wayfarer. His thought in the *Munājāt* is in perfect

agreement with his didactic and spiritual manuals. Here the tone of the conversation is intimate and at times austere or sober. The master speaks freely, and his fierce temperament comes through. He instills in the very structure of his writing a theology. The text is built on a repetitive opening phrase: “O God!” It is an intimate utterance and a sign of nearness to God. The text is full of redundancy, paradoxes, and association of opposite terms and images. De Beaurecueil takes seriously these paradoxes and oppositions because they are the best representatives of the master’s wisdom.¹⁴² For example:

O God! People indicate how near You are, but You are loftier than that. People think how far You are, but You are much closer than the soul. You are found (*mawjūd*) in the spirit of Your champions, (for) You are present (*hādir*) in the hearts of those who mention Your Name.¹⁴³

More explicitly, in the following excerpts the paradoxical language reaches its climax:

How could I have known that the mother of joy is sorrow, and that under every misfortune a thousand treasures are hiding? How could I have known that the desire is the bringer of Union, and that beneath the cloud of Munificence despair is impossible? How could I have known that the Possessor of Majesty is so comforting toward (His) devotees, and that the friends (of God) are so much favored by him? How could I have known that what I am searching for is in the midst of the soul, and that the honor of Your Union is for me an opening and a victory?¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, Anṣārī’s *Munājāt* celebrates the glory of God but seems to suggest the annihilation of the wayfarer as the ultimate goal. A close reading of the text shows that each passage is structured in the dialectic of the divine (You) and the human (I). God and God’s servant are metaphors of sorts for each other. In fact, the servant is defined and qualified according to God’s commands and human status before his Lord is fully realized. Fortunately, the wisdom and spiritual insights of the *Munājāt* seem to have managed to transcend obvious translation loss and give to non-Persian

readers a compelling view of the Pīr-e ṭāriqat. The following excerpts are tangible examples of these flashes of grace or gemlike spiritual jewels from the master. The *Munājāt* are a successful attempt to put into words the ineffable encounter and conversation with the divine. A few samples of these gleaming gems of spiritual wisdom help make our point:

In the agony suffered for you,
the wounded find the scent of balm:
The memory of you consoles the souls of lovers.
Thousands in every corner, seeking glimpses of you,
Cry out like Moses, “Lord, show me yourself!”
I see thousands of lovers lost in a desert of grief,
Wandering aimlessly and saying hopefully
“O God! O God!”
I see breasts scorched by the burning separation from you;
I see eyes weeping in love’s agony.
Dancing down the lane of blame and censure,
your lovers cry out, “Poverty is my source of price!”
Pir-i Ansārī has quaffed the wine of longing:
Like Majnūn he wanders drunk and perplexed
through the world.¹⁴⁵

This chapter sought to examine primarily de Beaurecueil’s (and other scholars’) study and interpretation of the corpus attributed to Anṣārī with emphasis on a few seminal works. The Dominican friar’s scientific assessment and textual criticism of the master’s corpus is unparalleled in Western languages. Robert Caspar paid tribute to his scholarship in these words:

Serge de Beaurecueil has taken up the considerable task of editing and studying the whole of the thought of al-Anṣārī. During the first phase of his study he edited the commentaries with *The Book of Stages*, at least the two earliest ones. Then he followed the critical edition of the text itself. The life of al-Anṣārī was studied in its historical context. Finally, various smaller works filling in the teaching of the master [were] edited. All this constitutes the scholarly aspect of the work of Serge de Beaurecueil. One can

only admire him for the high quality of his scholarship: the investigation of manuscripts accessible only with difficulty (some of them have been found in Afghanistan in private libraries hitherto unexplored), the establishment of relationships between manuscripts and above all a meticulous concern for precision in the use of terms and ideas relating to the mystical experience of al-Anṣārī. It is indeed works as exacting as these that bring about progress in the study of Ṣūfīsm and make the elaboration of a valid, general view of Muslim mysticism possible.¹⁴⁶

The questions of authenticity surrounding the works attributed to the master should not cast excessive doubt on the authorship of the corpus. Most scholars mentioned in this study have concluded that notwithstanding the multiple editions and additions on the part of various students and copyists, the corpus attributed to the master is largely accurate. The question of authorship must be understood in the context of eleventh-century Khurāsān and not in reference to any other period. The master's students, disciples, and the general readership were concerned with the spiritual insights of the corpus and not with the exact wording of his teaching. Our study is a window through which the most important part of de Beaurecueil's scholarship can be assessed. The master's spiritual manuals, *Ṣad maydān*, *Manāzil*, *'Ilal al-Maqāmāt*, and the *Munājāt*, were for de Beaurecueil jewels of spiritual lessons, and he understood himself as much as a disciple as a scholar of the master's work. No erudition on his part could conceal his deep affection for his patron saint.

The Dominican friar's writings paint the portrait of a man who sought to live an authentic Dominican life in the most unlikely milieu. This chapter is also a springboard for the next one. The Dominican friar's life parallels the erudition of Massignon, is reminiscent of the life of Charles de Foucauld among Tuaregs, and encompasses the ethical dimension of interfaith encounter. These different dimensions reach their summit in his twenty years of pastoral ministry in Kabul from 1963 to 1983. The next chapter examines the embodiment of this mystical praxis with its intractable difficulties and hopes.

De Beaurecueil's Pastoral Mysticism in Kabul

On August 31 1983, de Beaurecueil was evacuated for medical reasons from Kabul to Paris. He arrived completely exhausted at the priory of l'Annonciation.¹ This bleak physical state echoed a tragic departure, which in turn symbolized a disastrous end of his love affair with the Afghan people and the land of Anṣārī. The tragedy of the Afghan civil war and the friar's dreadful departure stood in stark contrast to the enthusiasm of his arrival in Kabul in 1963. His journey to and in Afghanistan represented a rise of his mystical intuition and *praxis*. He became less and less concerned with an orientalist's scholarly work. Rather, he was more and more attuned to the *praxis* of a spiritual life, the day-to-day human encounter and the practice of everyday life.² This unusual path seemed strange to many close observers and friends. In an article written in honor of Louis Massignon, de Beaurecueil explained:

Dear Louis Massignon, I am no longer an orientalist, just an elementary school teacher. First, I abandoned my research position for a faculty position, and then left my professorship to teach at a grammar school. Now, I am on the verge of becoming a primary school teacher. The scholar that you were might regret at first glance this strange downward mobility ... However, the man of God, the prophet and servant would certainly understand this unusual path of mine. My journey is marred with broken steles adamantly pointing to heaven ...³

What the friar lost in academic endeavor, he gained in pastoral engagement. In de Beaurecueil's mystical conversation with the Pīr of Herāt, he combined interspirituality (Islam and Christianity) with enculturation

(adaptation of his Christian liturgy to an Afghan background). His attachment to people, particularly children living in dire socioeconomic situations in a beautiful and yet devastated country, tested his core identity as a friar and a priest. In the abode of Islam, he traveled unparalleled roads and had to reimagine what it meant to be a faithful Christian disciple among Muslims.⁴ He strove to craft a genuine religious life that was Christian in faith but Afghan in culture. This process demanded a slow and careful method of integration and reevaluation of his vocation as a friar preacher. Kabul street children were the greatest gift of his life and the most painful and formative aspect of his mystical journey. The living encounter between Christianity and Islam took place at the House of Abraham, where he attempted to offer hospitality and share “bread and salt” with the descendants of the Pīr of Herāt. His adventure uncovered a deep understanding of how mysticism and *praxis* converged in the depths of contemplative consciousness in the deepest dimension of Islam and Christianity. The convergence in de Beaurecueil’s case went beyond speculative theology and settled on spiritual life and practice. He observed:

Sufism brought me to Afghanistan, but Afghanistan forced me out of Sufism in order to engage a more vital research, no longer in books but in the mundane and everyday service to people. In this gloomy environment all steles as soon as erected are mercilessly broken, but still pointing to heaven.⁵

To explore de Beaurecueil’s *praxis mystica* or pastoral mysticism, this chapter draws, first, a comparison between the lives of de Beaurecueil and Charles de Foucauld in their attempts to follow the prophetic and mystical example of Jesus of Nazareth among Muslims. The second and the third sections focus respectively on two books, *A Christian in Afghanistan* and *My Children of Kabul*. These books are portraits of de Beaurecueil’s life as a friar preacher in a land he learned to love and cherish. This investigation is a window into his spirituality or mystical theology, which is Catholic and Dominican in scope, committed to dialogue, intuitive yet practical in its goals.

I. In the Footsteps of Jesus: Charles de Foucauld and de Beaurecueil

If de Beaurecueil's erudition on Anṣārī parallels Louis Massignon's work on al-Ḥallāj, the friar's pastoral mysticism is reminiscent of the path of Massignon's mentor Charles de Foucauld (d. 1921) in Tamanrasset among the Tuaregs of the Hoggar (Algeria).⁶ Both de Foucauld and de Beaurecueil shared an aristocratic background, and their families had deep ties with the French army. They were nonetheless different in temperament and life trajectories. With regard to our inquiry, both men shared a stunning commonality: an attempt to live an authentic Christian religious life in the context of religious and cultural otherness. Like Jesus of Nazareth's quiet and hidden life before his public ministry, de Beaurecueil and de Foucauld chose to live a quiet Christian life among Muslims. These two men lived as guests in the abode of Islam, where in relation to Muslims they tried to live a genuine Christian discipleship. Even though de Foucauld died a tragic death and de Beaurecueil's sojourn in Kabul ended abruptly, their lives were signs on the rocky road of Christian-Muslim relations. The first section explores the mystical and prophetic lives of both men as *imitatio Christi*.

*1. Religious Life as a Prophetic Life Form*⁷

Why would de Beaurecueil consider the topic of prophethood? It seems that he saw his ministry in Kabul as a prophetic call. He lays out his definition of a prophet:

Whatever one thinks, prophets are not fortune tellers but speak on behalf of the divine. God chooses, sends and gives them a word to speak and a work to do. Unfortunately, prophets are human beings, and God loves them too much to reduce them to robots or tape recorders ... They must first listen, receive and eat the word like Jeremiah; and often the message is not to their taste ...⁸

Indeed, the remarkable character of de Beaurecueil's life in Kabul combines a prophetic witness and the ethical dimension of religious dialogue. He traveled the path of a Christian prophet and mystic among Muslims. According to John Henry Newman, authentic Christian prophets and mystics are those:

who live in a way least thought of by others, the way chosen by Jesus of Nazareth, to make headway against all the power and wisdom of the world. It is a difficult and rare virtue, to mean what we say, to love without deceit, to think no evil, to bear no grudge, to be free from selfishness, to be innocent and straightforward ... simple hearted. They take everything in good part which happens to them, and make the best of everything.⁹

Even though every comparison is ephemeral and limited, I argue that both de Beaurecueil and de Foucauld tried to live a genuine religious life in Kabul and in Tamanrasset among Muslims. Their witnesses in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, even though human and broken, are congruent with the description of Sandra Schneiders, one of the most prolific scholars of Christian spirituality and Catholic religious life. She argues that “Jesus was extraordinarily ‘unattached,’ he had no family to provide for or to protect. He owned no personal property that he could lose. He held no official position of power, political or ecclesial, that his actions could jeopardize.”¹⁰ Faithful to Jesus’s life, these men are but two of the too few examples of what Schneiders calls “[r]eligious life as a prophetic life form.”¹¹ The thrust of their lives was a participation in the prophetic mission of Jesus of Nazareth rather than concern with ecclesial power structures. Schneiders sees three main prophetic characteristics in Jesus’s life that could be extended to both men:

First, Jesus’ prophetic vocation was rooted in and expressive of his mystical life, the intense contemplative prayer life that the Gospels present as the roots of his experiential knowledge of God.

A second requirement of prophetic identity and mission is a certain freedom from attachments which pressure the person to prefer personal and institutional goods, the maintaining of the status quo within which one’s own position and interests are protected, to God’s interests or the good of those to whom one is sent.

Third, a major non-negotiable criterion of the true prophet is the coherence between the prophet’s message and the prophet’s life.¹²

Without a doubt, these religious men tried to imitate Jesus's detachment from worldly affairs, but each in a different manner. De Foucauld's lifestyle was that of a hermit and a monk, whereas de Beaurecueil shared his abode with orphans and Kabul street children.¹³ There were irreducible differences between these religious men's experiences, but their lives shared the common denominator of "Call, response and the task of prophetic action,"¹⁴ though of course with its human flaws and shortcomings. I am well aware of Dominique Casajus's insightful reading of de Foucauld. He believes that de Foucauld was one of the best scholars of the Tuaregs' language but doubts that he was an example of Christian-Muslim dialogue. At least de Foucauld's life was an encounter.¹⁵

2. Imitating the Hidden Life of Jesus of Nazareth

Tamanrasset and Kabul were quite unusual settings for a Catholic monk and a Dominican friar. One could argue that de Beaurecueil found himself in a place where the theology of priesthood in Christian tradition and his scholastic formation as a friar preacher seemed of little help. His seventeen years of erudite work on *Anṣārī* were far more useful than his years of formation at Le Saulchoir. This is not the place to do a lengthy exposé on the Christian theology of priesthood¹⁶ or religious life,¹⁷ but I do need to deal with these issues briefly. The questions posed by de Beaurecueil's Kabul years must not be underrated; on the contrary, one must shed light on them to follow his journey. How could he be a Catholic priest for non-Christians in a country like Afghanistan?¹⁸ How could he live an authentic Dominican life without a religious community? What about the theological incompatibilities between the two faith traditions? He had become a friar preacher to live a conventual life, namely, the common liturgy of the hours and partaking in the Eucharist, study, and community life. He would have been the first to recognize his awkward predicament:

Often I thought about it. At eighteen I became a Dominican mostly because of the liturgy of the hours, the conventual life, the habit and of course the tonsure. At sixty, here I am: no habit, no liturgy of the hours and I live thousand miles away from my priory of assignment (Beirut), which I have not seen in years.

Here, I am overwhelmed by my profane work ... Nothing like what I first had in mind apart from going away in a non-Christian country. Ironically, I feel right at home. Am I faithful?¹⁹

It seems that in the midst of Muslims, de Beaurecueil opted for the hidden life of Jesus, namely, the imitation of Jesus in Nazareth as the ideal form of religious life. He and de Foucauld understood well that in his prophetic ministry, Jesus did not claim an independent personal divine authority when he acted. Jesus claimed to be speaking for God, and in the name of God is Father. What would be the theological meaning of this hidden life?

Of course, a neatly parallel reading of de Foucauld's and de Beaurecueil's lives is a stretch,²⁰ but it is a worthwhile venture because both were Christian lives implanted in the heart of an Islamic land. Again, both men were different, and their itineraries seem to diverge. De Foucauld was a former military officer and an agnostic aristocratic Parisian whose dramatic return to the Catholic faith more resembled that of Massignon, his spiritual pupil. His encounter with Islam in North Africa had a profound effect on him. He was impressed by Muslims' constant remembrance of the names of God, their prostrations in prayer in the open desert, and the overwhelming rhythm of the call to prayer by the muezzin.²¹ There is enough literature on de Foucauld's life and work among the Tuareg of Tamanrasset; as Dominique Casajus, a French scholar of the Tuareg language and poetry and a keen reader of de Foucauld's life, remarks:

To this day, the stream never stopped. As these books roll in year after year, they have obscured instead of shedding light on the enigma of a troubled soul who was haunted, obstinate and excessive. Charles de Foucauld's life has, however, incited authentic work by historians, who have, for two or three decades, given a more complex and human image to him than his popular hagiographical icon.²²

Unlike many biographers, Casajus does not focus on de Foucauld's path to holiness and martyrdom, but he investigates the relationship between the Tuaregs and the Christian hermit from August 1905 to

December 1916. His books and articles try to answer the following questions: What was de Foucauld's self-consciousness, or how did he understand himself? What kind of relationship did he have with the Tuaregs, who saw him as an ally to the French colonizers? How did the language, culture, and religion of the Tuaregs influence his life and work? What did the Tuaregs think about his religious practices of severe asceticism and celibacy? For example, the Tuaregs did not find any virtue in his celibate life. As Casajus notes, "What is considered an ideal of chastity by some is regarded as a shameful life which gets away from the duty of child rearing."²³ This crucial point underscores the cultural and theological gaps that exist at times between these two faith traditions: Catholic religious ideals and Islamic ones. There are many biographies written by Christians about the Hoggar hermit, but there are few accounts from Muslim authors.

In addition, de Foucauld's biographers do not always separate hagiographical material proper to Christian martyrology from serious historical questions surrounding the role of a former French army service man who became a hermit living among defeated and colonized Tuaregs. 'Alī Merad, a Muslim and Algerian himself, seems to offer a worthy approach to what he terms "[a] Muslim's view of Charles de Foucauld."²⁴ There is no doubt that Merad's views are questionable at times, but his argument suits our needs at this point.²⁵ He asserted, "It is in the land of Islam ... that Charles de Foucauld felt, if not the irresistible outpouring of grace, at least the initial inner thrill that heralded the first movement of his soul toward the path of faith."²⁶ Muslims' radical monotheism (*tawhīd*) and sense of God's providence (*tawakkul*) summoned him deeply. He confessed, "The sight of this faith, of these souls living in the continuous presence of God, has made me aware of something greater and truer than worldly preoccupation."²⁷ By both the local Tuaregs and the French military, de Foucauld was regarded as a local French agent. Never did he sever ties with his military past or his French nationalism. His devotion to the colonial army and French supremacy never abated. His life ended in apparent failure. He had made no converts nor left any successors. He waited in vain for Louis Massignon to join him in Tamanrasset. His rule of life for a new religious order existed only on paper.²⁸ None of these aspects was found in de Beaurecueil's life.

However, de Foucauld and de Beaurecueil shared a key sense of Christian missiology, namely, a form of religious life in reference “to the mystery of Nazareth—the mystery of the Word assuming the life of the ‘little people’ who toil in the world and thus show forth respect, understanding and sensitiveness.”²⁹ They did not come to build hospitals, schools, and churches or to convert Muslims. They did not come to live among the rich and powerful but among the poorest of the poor in Muslim lands. Both men were deeply impressed by the land and its inhabitants. Islam played a key role in the blossoming of their spiritual vocation and the development of their religious awareness.

De Beaurecueil recognized in the religious other the face of the infinite. He knew the Afghans did not lack spirituality or need another faith tradition to be saved. He understood that it is in giving that we receive. Robert Bédon, in his preface to *A Priest of non-Christians*, writes, “You gave them all, and the more you give the more you are a recipient of their gifts.”³⁰ De Beaurecueil learned to respect the religious others regardless of their material poverty and/or physical handicap. The most important aspect of this encounter was to honor the irreducible difference of the religious Other. De Beaurecueil chose to serve not an institution but people under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth. The hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth was the quiet and silent life before the beginning of his public ministry.³¹ De Foucauld defined it in the following terms:

Jesus came to Nazareth, the place of the hidden life, of ordinary life, of family life, of prayer, work, obscurity, silent virtues, practices with no witnesses other than God, his friends and neighbors. Nazareth is the place where most people direct their lives. We must infinitely respect the least of our brothers. Let us mingle with them. Let us be one of them to the extent that God wishes and treat them fraternally in order to have the honor and joy of being accepted as one of them.³²

And de Beaurecueil followed suit:

The incarnated Word of God took seriously the old saying. He started with silence for thirty years without giving up on the mission. At times, silence is the best medium for the Message.

For the incarnated Word silence embodied prophetic utterances. There are times the prophet must speak in spite of threats; there are times the prophet must keep silence, not because of fear but the Spirit demands it for the sake of the Word that the prophet bears and must not betray.³³

De Beaurecueil and de Foucauld took seriously this hidden life of Jesus and used it as the framework of their spirituality among Muslims. Nazareth meant not just a hidden life lived in detachment from the world, a life of work behind the walls of a monastery, but a life amid the poor in the world. The mystery of Nazareth was understood by both men as to come and be, to dwell among others, to be seen first before being heard, to understand first before being understood. As de Foucauld put it, “Your vocation is to shout the Gospel from the rooftops, not in words, but with your life.”³⁴ De Foucauld and de Beaurecueil wanted to be among those who were the furthest removed, the most abandoned. They wanted all who drew close to them to find a brother, “a universal brother.”³⁵ They formed a kind of fictive kinship with Muslims in their respective settings. With great respect for the culture and faith of those among whom they lived, their desire was to shout the Gospel with their lives. De Foucauld writes, “I would like to be sufficiently good that people would say, ‘If such is the servant, what must the Master be like?’ ”³⁶

Both religious men chose to listen, think, and observe quietly for years in order that from their long, pregnant silence would come forth the word of God in its purity. They lived lives of Christian compassion among Muslims. In Tamanrasset, villagers called de Foucauld a *marabout* (or a holy man), and in Kabul, de Beaurecueil was the *padar* (father). Their deep sense of solidarity and hope for the people they lived with explained the joy, peace, and love that radiated from their silence and hidden life among Muslims. Both men were “holy fools” consumed by an inner fire that was for them the love of Jesus and a passion for the imitation of the Nazarene. Seeking to emulate the hidden life of Jesus and to welcome all humanity, de Foucauld wrote:

I want to accustom myself to all the inhabitants, Christians, Muslims, Jews, and non-believers, to look on me as their brother, their universal brother. Already they are calling this house “the

fraternity house” (*khaoua*)—about which I am delighted—and realizing that the poor have a brother here—not only the poor, but all men [and women].”³⁷

The lives of these two aristocratic men, turned religious, proclaimed the inner core of the Reign of God, and their mission gave birth to an authentic religious life.

But in de Foucauld and de Beaurecueil, both of whom devoted their lives to bearing witness to their Christian discipleship before a Muslim community, there were legitimate questions at stake. Alongside their friendship and care for Muslims hovered a lingering paternalism in these Frenchmen’s relations with their Muslim counterparts. It is fair to hold against de Foucauld the fact that he was an objective ally of the colonial army. He was shaped by his education, his military training, and the ethos of French colonialism in northern Africa. The historical background of his generation was the moral and intellectual climate of late nineteenth-century Europe with Gobineau’s *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Race*; Ernest Renan’s (d. 1892) infamous lecture “Islam and Science,” in which he described Islam as intellectually inferior and incompatible with science; and Monseigneur Lavigerie (d. 1892), founder of the Missionaries for Africa, who held similar views.³⁸ There is no evidence that de Foucauld read Gobineau and Renan, adhered to their philosophy of races, or borrowed their approach to Islam. Nonetheless, it would be naive to think that he lived in a French colonial land with the background of a former officer in the French army but remained free from colonial biases. Casajus proved that Foucauld never severed his ties with the colonial French army in North Africa.³⁹ For instance, he hoped for the conversion of Muslims to Christianity and believed that adherence to Catholicism meant fidelity to France, “the first daughter” of the Roman Catholic Church, as his homeland was called.

The Christian marabout was aware of the difficulty of his position and wondered, “Will they [the Tuaregs] know how to distinguish between soldiers and priests, to see us as servants of God, envoys of peace, universal brothers.”⁴⁰ De Foucauld sought to prepare the Saharan souls for the seed of the Gospel. He notes, “My little work goes on … preparatory work … I have not yet come to sowing. I am preparing the ground, other will sow, and

others will reap.”⁴¹ Merad remarks that de Foucauld’s hope for the Tuaregs’ eventual conversion to Catholicism was unreasonable:

But there is a threshold beyond which, it seems to us, he could not reasonably hope to succeed: that is from the moment that the guest and the Christian marabout resolved not only to win the hearts of Tuaregs, but their conscience. For it is one thing to seek the friendship of the Muslim population and summon them ceaselessly to make them better. It was another thing to try to shatter their certainties in order to induce them to get rid of all, or part, of their beliefs and give up ancestral faith. Such a renunciation would have meant the “unraveling” of the intimate fibers of their beings.⁴²

To the question “What was their inner feeling about Islam and its Prophet?,” the silence of de Foucauld on the authenticity of Muḥammad’s prophethood points to the difficulty of the issue.⁴³ Merad questions his deep motives:

There was his charitable work, his inexhaustible kindness, his undeniable desire to do good to the Muslims around him. But beyond his silence about the Qur’ān, the Prophet and the saints, as well as on the subject of Muslim practices in general, what were the Christian marabout’s innermost feelings about Islam?”⁴⁴

One could argue that, like many holy and exemplary lives, ambiguity and mixed motives did not shatter his legacy but rendered it more human. Merad concludes, “Beyond the inevitable blunders and errors of judgment ..., there remains this exceptional human adventure that will continue to summon the Muslim as well as the Christian consciousness.”⁴⁵ De Foucauld’s devotion and compassion to the Tuaregs, desire for authentic brotherhood, and constant effort to see and treat Muslims not as strangers but as neighbors and to share their lot endured until his death. No wonder that Merad asks, “Under the circumstances, would it be too much to think that, although he may belong to Christianity spiritually, the great hermit of the Sahara belongs in some way to Islam, since he chose a Muslim country

for his last dwelling place?”⁴⁶ I rather agree with D. Casajus’s conclusion that it might be controversial to call de Foucauld a pioneer of Christian-Muslim dialogue, but his friend and disciple L. Massignon was one of the most prominent ones in France.⁴⁷

On his part, de Beaurecueil did not take a position concerning the thorny issue of the authenticity of the Prophet of Islam. He did not see, however, any spiritual inferiority in Muslims. On the contrary, Persian mystics and mystical poems nourished his sacramental, liturgical, and spiritual life and imagination. At times he sounds a little presumptuous, leaving his confused readers thinking that he had a messiah complex. Correctly, Bédon remarks, “Personally, if I have read this book without knowing you, but would I have done it? I would have shrugged my shoulders and said, ‘he thinks he is God himself.’ ”⁴⁸ How could he make Muslims participate spiritually in the mystery of Christian sacraments? He writes, “[O]n their behalf and even though they are not aware of it, I reinterpret their lives, aspirations, mystical poems, and liturgical acts, and I bestow upon them Christian and salvific values and give them back to God. Intercession and substitution combine to guide my life.”⁴⁹

The Dominican friar was fully aware of the difficulty of praying with his house full of children. He could not live with the fact that Christian liturgical and sacramental rules excluded those with whom he shared daily life. He tried several liturgical schemes to include them but the results were artificial and ambiguous. Finally, he recognized the irreducible differences between the two traditions. particularly for liturgical prayer. Christians cannot pray the *salāh*, and Muslims cannot be communicants at the Eucharist. The Dominican friar’s action raises valuable questions for interfaith dialogue. Could Christians and Muslims pray together, and could prayer be a meeting place? For Christiaan van Nispen tot Sevenaer, S.J., who lived most of his life in Egypt, prayer is a legitimate meeting point. Praying together might not be possible, but prayer is a fundamental expression of both the Christian and the Muslim faiths. As long as prayer is not limited to its liturgical expressions, it could represent a real openness to the divine and the other. Sevenaer writes, “Prayer as well as the entire spiritual life can be a real place for encounter between Christians and Muslims. A place of encounter does not erase the differences but it offers an

opportunity for both sides to walk towards the other and in so doing they walk toward God.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil was influenced by Massignon’s and Mary Kahil’s (d. 1979) notion of *badaliyya*, which means to take the place of the other or substitute for another.⁵¹ Kahil defines *badaliyya*: “Massignon and I made a vow. We offer ourselves for Muslims’ salvation. Not for them to convert but for God’s will to be done upon them and through them. We want to make ours their prayers and lives and offer them to the Lord.”⁵² Indeed, in 1934, Kahil and Massignon made a vow before the altar of a Franciscan church in Damietta (Egypt) to the God of Abraham, father of the Jews, Christians and Muslims. They dedicated their lives to pray to God with and for their Muslim neighbors. Until the end of his life, Massignon wrote an annual letter to the members of the *badaliyya* that expressed the intensity of his spirituality and deep mystery of mystical substitution. In addition, *badaliyya* embraces Massignon’s own understanding that by learning the language and experiencing the tradition and culture of the religious other, our own religious life is enhanced.

The idea of intercession for the religious other, particularly the Muslim other, not for conversion but for the will of God to be realized with them and through them, deeply marked de Beaurecueil’s spirituality. He saw himself, like Massignon and Kahil, offering to God prayers (*du’ā’*) on behalf of the Afghans and other Muslims of the world. The following prayer, titled “a prayer of a priest in Kabul,” makes our point:

Thus at night, when my people are at sleep, barefoot, and squatting in the recesses of my chapel, I intercede for them like Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Jesus ... A perfume from a stick of sandalwood symbolizes those consumed by daily hard labor, affliction and love ... And I am there, weighed down by my people’s shortcomings, grieved by their pain, but filled with hope. All those who have passed away today and thought they are meeting a Judge; I introduce them to their Savior and invite them to the Eternal Banquet. All the little ones born today, I make them children of God. Today, every prayer said in their houses and mosques, I convert them into the “Lord’s Prayer” ... My heart has become the crucible where the fire of the love of Christ melts all our mish-mashes and transforms them into gold. Through my lips,

the entire Afghanistan raises its voice towards the Father—the Abba who gives them the Spirit.⁵³

This statement could sound arrogant, grandiose, and off-putting not only for Muslims but for Christians as well. This is an example of how unaware of his own biases yet sincere the Dominican friar was among Muslims. Also, in Christian theologies, intercession on behalf of another person seems widely accepted. In Islam, on the contrary, the idea of intercession raises heated theological debates that are beyond the scope of our immediate purpose. *Badaliyya* is certainly open to serious criticism, particularly on the Muslim side. Who are those Christians who believe they could intercede for their fellow Muslims? De Beaurecueil's prayer is laden with Christian fulfillment theologies and will sound problematic to most ears, especially Muslim ones. Does *badaliyya* fail to take seriously both faith traditions' irreducible difference? In any case, praying for or with the religious other could be a sign of care, hospitality, and recognition of a shared and deeply ingrained truth: together we stand before God and in the name of God. Even though intercession or praying together remains a delicate and unsettling issue for interfaith dialogue, it seems that *badaliyya* could foster a respectful attention to the religious experience of the other. Maybe it is in these irreducible differences of faith traditions that religious dialogue is most appreciated.⁵⁴

To return to Christians' view of Muslims, at least for de Beaurecueil and de Foucauld, one could argue that they did not think that their hosts (the Muslim peoples of the Sahara and Afghanistan) were to be freed from their "spiritual dereliction" and delivered to Western religious culture. But could these Christian lives implanted in the heart of Islamic lands be allowed an *epoché* or to bracket the irreconcilable doctrinal and theological questions? It seemed that as guests they recognized that there were boundaries to their actions and that they must observe a certain restraint and deference.

Also, unless they wanted to be presumptuous, they needed to acknowledge the limitations of an outsider who by definition lacks the inner knowledge to appreciate the genuineness of the religious faith of the other. The practice of great reserve on doctrinal and theological matters meant that "perfect imitation of Jesus by a Christian must assume a great moral and spiritual significance in the eyes of Muslims."⁵⁵ For de Beaurecueil, God's providence for humanity is unfathomable and surely includes the Afghan.

In his article “*Pas de frontiers au Royaume de Dieu*,” he came back to the distinction, on the one hand, between a Christian and a disciple of Jesus, and on the other, between the reign of God and the historical Catholic Church.⁵⁶ His role was to be the best Christian guest to his Muslim hosts by faithfully imitating Jesus. Hence, the prophetic and hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth grounded also de Beaurecueil’s theology of priesthood. The orthopraxy of his religious life and priesthood was the dialogue of life of a Christian in Afghanistan.

II. A Priest of Non-Christians

This section follows the Dominican friar’s meditation on specific features of his religious identity among Muslims.

1. A Catholic Priest in Kabul

Our investigation pays attention not to the classical role of a priest in a Christian community but to how the Muslim community and other friends in Kabul shaped de Beaurecueil’s theology and praxis of priesthood. The Christian theology of priesthood borrows from the cultic priesthood of the Hebrew people and the New Testament theology.⁵⁷ If the classical theology of priesthood in Christian tradition seems of little value to de Beaurecueil in Kabul, could one argue that the Qur’ānic treatment of “the People of the Book,” and particularly its portraits of monasticism (*rahbāniyya*)⁵⁸ and monk (*rāhib*), had some influence on him? Among the primary sources for Muslims’ understanding of Christianity and particularly monasticism, a few Qur’ānic verses seem pertinent.⁵⁹ It is there that our investigation looks for Muslims’ expectations of a Christian priest.⁶⁰ To be certain, the Islamic view of monasticism is diverse and complex, and the Qur’ān itself is ambivalent and ambiguous about Christian monks and priests.

Four Qur’ānic verses refer directly to monks or monasticism: verse 82 of *sūrat al-Mā’idah*, 31 and 34 of *sūrat al-Tawba*, and 27 of *sūrat al-Hadīd*.⁶¹ Generally, Q.5:82 and 83 seem to praise and hold Christian monks as good models and commend their practice of mortification. However, the Qur’ānic verse 27 of *sūrat al-Hadīd* remarks that monasticism was a Christian invention and Christian monks failed to live up to its demands.

The verse recognizes nonetheless that the motive of monastic life is to please God. Also, a number of positive characters are ascribed to Christians, such as “kindness and mercy.” Likewise, verses 82 to 85 of *sūrat al-Mā’idah* point to Christian monks’ humility and meekness and describe them as the “nearest in friendship.”⁶² Finally, in the early days of Islam, Abū Bakr al-Šiddīq’s instruction to Yazīd ibn Abū Sufyān before the conquest of Syria seems to suggest that Christian monks were protected.⁶³ Similarly, M. Ayoub, a scholar of Islamic studies and a seasoned writer in Christian-Muslim relations, asserts that this tolerant attitude of Q.5:85 is pertinent even in times of conflict and hostility and could serve as a reminder for Muslims to show restraint against the common human tendency to cruel revenge against the enemy. He traces the application of these principles back to the time of the Prophet and concludes that they became Sunna, an example binding on all later generations.⁶⁴ He refers to a ḥādīth related on the authority of Abū Bakr:

Do not betray [one another in war]. Do not commit treachery. Do not mutilate or kill a young child, an old man or woman. Do not cut down trees bearing fruits. Do not slaughter a sheep, a cow or a camel except if you need it for food. *You shall pass by people who have dedicated themselves to acts of devotion in their hermitages.*
*Let them be, and that to which they have dedicated themselves.*⁶⁵

Nonetheless, there are dissenting voices that remark that, first, even Q.5:82 is not particularly favorable to monasticism, contrary to the interpretation accepted by many Christian-Muslim dialogue circles. Second, the verses in *sūrat al-Tawba* are anticlerical and very critical of Christian monks, and third, the verse of *sūrat al-Ḥadīd* justifies the condemnation of Christian monasticism. These critics see a fundamental rejection of priesthood in Islamic tradition.⁶⁶ In the case of de Beaurecueil, however, these fears and critical approaches to Christian monasticism did not play out in hostility, and the Afghans seem to have accepted his religious status. They read Q.2:62 and 5:62 favorably to Christians in this case.

Another reason for sympathy was that de Beaurecueil’s Christian idea of religious life, holiness, and imitation of Christ did not fit *sūrat al-Tawbah*’s depiction of Christians in verses 31 and 34. On the contrary, his

life was in stark contrast to abuses of power and wealth in some Christian religious circles and to the cult of shaykhs and saints in certain circles in Afghanistan. It was (and is) a common practice in parts of the Muslim world that the shaykh had almost unlimited authority over his followers.⁶⁷ This was contrary to de Beaurecueil's care for Kabul street children.

Unlike some religious leaders, priors and abbots, or marabouts and shaykhs, who lorded it over their own communities, the Dominican friar assumed the hidden life of the poor and strove to live humbly. He came to identify Kabul with Nazareth or Jerusalem. At least one could say that de Beaurecueil's apostolate was Christian and mystical at its core but also congruent with some Qur'ānic mandates: “[T]he most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you”; “Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct” (Q.49:13); and “So vie one with another in good works” (Q.5:48). He did not see himself adhering to these Qur'ānic mandates. He saw himself squarely faithful to his religious life, namely, the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the life story of Saint Dominic. To be certain, a mysterious impulse led the Dominican friar to the House of Islam and opened his heart to the poor. In Kabul, he tried to humanize a land so wild that it seemed to be torn from a lunar world.

There is no doubt that the examples of Afghan Muslims played an important role in de Beaurecueil's spiritual growth and transformed his views of mission. In Christianity as well as in Islam, the individual and the community of faith serve and worship God, and in Kabul, servanthood and worship were two faces of the same reality for him. The obvious influence is the work and life of his master, Anṣārī. From the Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī, he understood God's absolute sovereignty and majesty (*jalāl*), and from Rūmī he took away God's love and beauty (*jamāl*).⁶⁸ These two mystical intuitions present in Christian tradition also nourished a sense of awe and freedom in him. Likewise, the simplicity, dignity, humility, and poverty of most Afghans touched him deeply and forced him to be more authentic in his religious life and priesthood. Afghanistan's austere climate and the exquisite beauty of its landscape shaped its people and children, and de Beaurecueil experienced the beauty and the misery firsthand. He could not stand idle before children's pain and death. The suffering of innocent children due mainly to their families' dire socioeconomic situations prompted in him a revolt against an inhuman condition.

Furthermore, the whole notion of self-renunciation had a powerful appeal to Muslims. In our case, the Afghans were impressed by the sacrifice of a religious man who gave up wealth and comfort (de Beaurecueil came from aristocratic stock) and the security of conventional life to share the lot of the poor in the desert and mountains of Afghanistan.⁶⁹ From the Muslims' point of view, the Dominican friar's imitation of Jesus corresponded to the Islamic expectation of the People of the Book and was "the most eloquent way to espouse the authenticity of the Gospel message."⁷⁰ For example, Dr. Abdul Hamid Rahimi's friendship with de Beaurecueil was extraordinary. Both men shared a close spiritual affinity and a strong bond of brotherhood. Dr. Rahimi was a devout Muslim and a luminous example of evangelical life. De Beaurecueil recalled with great respect and admiration Rahimi's crucial distinction between a Christian and a disciple of Jesus. In conversation, de Beaurecueil called him an "anonymous Christian." No, he replied, I am not a Christian, but a Muslim who is also a disciple of Jesus. It is not the same thing. One can be a disciple of Christ without being a professing Christian.⁷¹

Similarly, de Beaurecueil's other closest friends were French expatriates⁷² (*coopérants*), most of them atheists and in whom he had a keen interest. Bédon, referred to as "the infidel of Kabul," paints this portrait of his Dominican friend: "[W]hat is certain is that you put your faith into practice by giving yourself completely, and living the principles of the carpenter of Nazareth that you claim. What is certain is that you believe in your role of pastor and prophet without boasting at all, instead with humility, stubbornness and at times with unbounded kindness in a tough world."⁷³ Another close friend, Étienne Gill, who lived with him for years and edited his diaries and letters during the civil war, speaks of the friar's deliberate attempt to live in harmony with Afghan culture and religious sensibilities as a token of hospitality to his household members and friends in Kabul. In addition, he cultivated a sincere friendship with the Little Sisters of Jesus, who follow the life example of Charles de Foucauld. De Beaurecueil's Kabul years were a perpetual learning curve, a constant reimagination of his religious life in uncharted territory. It is no wonder that his religious experience was completely other and almost impossible to duplicate. Our contention is that such a religious life betrays a scandalous inner freedom proper to prophets and mystics.

At any rate, de Beaurecueil's theological meditations about priesthood are the fruit of a Christian religious life shaped by Muslims. His whole theology of priesthood and religious life is squarely biblical and focused exclusively on the prophetic life and priesthood of Jesus of Nazareth. His theology is an attempt to retrieve the original intuition of the life and ministry of Jesus before "Constantinian Christianity" or what the South African Dominican friar Albert Nolan terms *Jesus before Christianity*.⁷⁴ De Beaurecueil's meditations are a kind of *ressourcement* or going back to the roots to understand the divine intuition at work in the portraits of Jesus given by the Christian scriptures. In his book *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan*, he sets a parallel between Jesus in Jerusalem and de Beaurecueil in Kabul as the celebrant, the prophet, the servant, and the pastor. Hence, our analysis is Christian in its orientation and Catholic in substance.

De Beaurecueil remained a Dominican friar to the core even though he took much liberty in contextualizing his religious life. In such a case, it is almost impossible to expect an immaculate consistency between spiritual experience and theological discourse. But there is not a total discontinuity between words and experience. His letters, articles, and books are treasures of spiritual meditations, and their titles are in themselves gems of wisdom.⁷⁵ The spiritual journey of this Dominican friar in Kabul expresses one way of being a Christian, a member of a religious order, and a priest in the Muslim world. As he puts it, "disciple and priest of Christ in my mountains, in the midst of my people who are unaware, I am constrained and my mission is to perpetuate the life of the Nazarene."⁷⁶ His priesthood expressed itself in two ministerial forms.

2. A Lonely Pastor and Celebrant

De Beaurecueil's meditations on what he calls *A Priest of Non-Christians* explores the pattern of Jesus of Nazareth's public ministry. His choice to parallel his life in Kabul in 1967 with that of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem might seem pretentious on his part. However, a close examination of his meditations reveals his constant search to emulate the prophetic life form of the historical Jesus.⁷⁷ According to Étienne Gill,⁷⁸ the Dominican friar turned out to be a pedagogue, theologian, and creative liturgist. Gill was a firsthand witness to how the Dominican friar managed to keep a daily horarium and celebration of the Eucharist in the most unusual

circumstances. He recalled that de Beaurecueil's constant aim was to create a liturgical and sacramental life inculcated into his Afghan milieu.

First, the Dominican friar believed that the Gospels and Christian religious life could find an abode in other cultures as they could inhabit the Greco-Roman one. De Beaurecueil attempted to remove his religious experience and theological imagination from the ambit of Western Latin Catholicism to be incarnated in the religious worldview of the people around him,⁷⁹ even though in his case, he was most of the time the only Christian at his liturgical celebration.⁸⁰ He realized that the celebration of the Eucharist among Muslim children was laden with serious misunderstanding. Christian liturgical experience was just too foreign for his household members. For him, the Eucharist embraced all human dimensions and unites the sacred to the mundane.

Second, he believed his entire religious life had to be founded not just on a theology congruent with his Afghan environment and thought forms, but on a properly Afghan style. Hence, he celebrated the liturgy of the hours and the Eucharist not in the white Dominican habit but in local attire. He translated "the lamb of God" in the *Agnus Dei* as "the lion of God." He chose the Eucharistic prayer from the Didache, used the Byzantine rite, and included Persian poetry. In Kabul, his theological imagination was stretched to its utmost capacity, and his liturgical experience was itself in a situation of utter otherness where nothing was familiar. In such a case, he surrendered to the promptings of Spirit.

De Beaurecueil's liturgical imagination in Kabul was reminiscent of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's⁸¹ *Hymn of the Universe*, written when de Chardin, in the course of a scientific expedition, found himself in the Ordos Desert (in China), where it was impossible to celebrate the Eucharist. One can argue that de Chardin's "The Mass on the World" spoke of the amazing lucidity of his scientific vision and mystical wisdom. Both he and de Beaurecueil experienced what most well-institutionalized religious life often undermines—the constant abiding presence of God, who surpasses all imagination and renders naught our petty attachment to liturgical elements. In de Chardin's case it was bread and wine, and in de Beaurecueil's the routine of conventional life. Here the friar, the priest, and the celebrant were united in the breaking of bread and salt.

3. We Share Bread and Salt

Often the dreadfulness of daily life is the ideal place where the most sacred religious experience occurs. Jesus's parables were ordinary stories pointing to the extraordinary presence of God. Similarly, the ordinary and almost mundane visit of Abdūl-Ghaffār Paktiyānī at the *Maison d'Abraham* was a fateful day that changed de Beaurecueil's life. Ghaffār said, "I came to ask you a favor. Would you like to share bread and salt with me? Once at your house and another time at mine and we will be friends forever."⁸² Hence, de Beaurecueil and Ghaffār were host and guest in each other's households for a brief time. Tragically, Ghaffār died several weeks later in a car accident. The sharing of bread and salt with Ghaffār was the ultimate sign, a turning point in de Beaurecueil's love affair with Afghanistan. At this point, it is fair to say that scholarly research on Anṣārī takes a back seat and a new era comes forth. It is not far-fetched to compare Ghaffār's invitation to Jesus's conversation with the Syrophoenician woman (Mk. 7:25–30 and Mt. 15:21–28) or Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's encounter with Shams Tabrīzī. Ghaffār's invitation and sudden death were an epiphany for de Beaurecueil. He remarks:

This accident deeply distressed me. I meditated on his invitation to share "bread and salt" together, and a quasi sacramental value was given to this gesture with indescribable consequences. It was during my meditation that all became clear to me. Undoubtedly, Ghaffār gave me the key to understand the meaning of my life in Kabul. I was here to share the life of Afghan people in the ordinariness of daily life, such as sharing a meal with them. This meal together tied my destiny to theirs and sealed my duty for intercession—very dear to Massignon—, and I became a link between the Afghans and Christ—a silent channel of grace.⁸³

This ephemeral gesture was a profound religious experience and spoke volumes to the Dominican friar. The experience provided meaning and significance to his role as a presbyter (*sacerdoce*) in an exclusively Muslim environment. In Afghanistan he rediscovered the meaning of prayer and sacramental life and the importance of pilgrimage when he visited Anṣārī's and Ghaffār's graveyards. De Beaurecueil could really say with honesty and gratitude:

Afghanistan is my spiritual home and Promised Land. My father (Anṣārī), my brothers (Rawān, Pāyanda and many others), my children (Ghaffār and others); these Afghans loved as they are in their grandeur and misery, joy and pain and hopes. They are the ones with whom I share bread and salt every day and I am fully aware of the significance of this sacred gesture.⁸⁴

The sacramental dimension of this gesture strikes a chord in the Dominican friar's self-consciousness. To break bread with the religious other is to share life, and out of this gesture, hospitality is offered and received, prayer is uttered, and a possibility of companionship is found. This gesture is a source of nourishment for spiritual and human friendship. First, de Beaurecueil shares bread and salt with Ghaffār, and after his death, anytime he does it with other Afghans, he realizes that this broken and shared bread, this simple and daily gesture symbolizes the agape, the communion of lives, and the presence of the divine in their midst. Theology is imbued in life, prayer, and love; and the discovery of spiritual links nurtured by sharing bread and salt,⁸⁵ and he concludes,

Faithful to this call, I repeat the prophetic gesture every day, at meal I share bread with my fellow Afghans and I embrace deeper and deeper their destiny. Every evening on their behalf, I consume the Bread, anticipating, prefiguring, and preparing the advent of the moment when illumined by the Spirit, filled with faith, consumed by love and answering their eternal invitation, they would have access to the mystery of the Altar.⁸⁶

For de Beaurecueil to share bread and salt with Afghans has ushered in a community and fosters a common destiny. Sharing salt and bread has opened his eyes to a new meaning of "Church," the local community that is part of the larger human community deeply loved and graced by God. He sees in this community the promise of the reign of God, already present and not yet accomplished. However, what about the religious other for whom the Catholic sense of sacramentality is completely foreign? The Dominican friar recognizes that the reality is not only beyond the religious other but most of all beyond himself. He remarks, "Afghans did not understand of

course ... but the reality was there independent of our grasp. Precisely, sharing bread and salt has a deliberate goal: to foster a community of lives, a unity of being, and in and through me they have a share in the mystery. ...

⁸⁷

In Catholic Christian theology, the Eucharist is the ultimate place where God's self-communication to humanity and human response meet in the most intimate way. It is not a moment of theological and philosophical discourse but a mystical encounter. For de Beaurecueil, sharing bread and salt contextualized his priestly and religious life, but above all, his daily life with his children at the *Maison d'Abraham* provided a unique Eucharistic milieu where he was the only Christian. de Beaurecueil recalled with some nostalgia his earlier years in Kabul, particularly the routine of a regular religious life with the liturgy of the Hours (three times a day), the celebration of Eucharist in the evening, and Compline (night prayer) before bedtime. The Eucharist was the highlight of a day of labor, the sacralization of daily bread, and the symbol of life shared with the Muslim other.⁸⁸

This liturgical celebration, however, was a lonely experience in the midst of Muslim children who looked bewildered and at times amused by the rite. In addition, he realized that there was a danger in playing the role of an indispensable minister—a role that none had given him. For centuries, the Afghans had lived without him, and the Holy Spirit had not waited for him to move their hearts.⁸⁹ It is yet another example of how the Dominican friar was forced to live an authentic religious life away from false piety, spiritual vanity, and arrogance. In the face of the religious other, he grasped the meaning of spiritual poverty and evangelical humility. De Beaurecueil seems to have found his treasure or the pearl of great price among Kabul street children.

III. My Children of Kabul

The context of civil war and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Red Army from December 27, 1979, to February 15, 1989, completely disrupted the life and routine of the *Maison d'Abraham*. Three years of the physical and emotional misery, death, and destruction wrought by the war ended a transformative experience of shared life with Kabul street children. The experience of war, though important, did not drastically influence de Beaurecueil's *praxis mystica*. Etienne Gill and Sylvie Heslot edited and

published a trail of letters that de Beaurecueil wrote from December 1979 until his departure in 1983.⁹⁰ The editors organized the letters in three volumes titled *Lettres d'Afghanistan de Serge de Beaurecueil: chronique d'un témoin privilégié* (*La terreur*, vol. 1, 1979; *Au bord du désespoir*, vol. 2, 1980; and *L'impasse*, vol. 3, 1981–83).

In these letters, de Beaurecueil describes the tragedy that befell Afghanistan and particularly his household. These accounts do not reflect the views of an insider close to the government or the rebellion forces battling the Soviet army and its local allies, but the diaries of an advisor at Lycée Esteqlāl and the *padar* of the *Maison d'Abraham*. His narratives are stories of the disappearance and incarceration of his “children,” the dire consequences of a civil war, the sinister sound of army choppers over Kabul, and people’s unbearable tension and deep anxiety. These circumstances fostered an environment that was a living hell. The accounts are naive at times, but also perceptive and nuanced. This collection of letters portrays the appalling turn of his adventure and particularly the demise of a dream: to live the rest of his life in Kabul and die in the land of his master. Pérennès writes, “Serge’s narratives are a day to day chronicle, real Stations of the Cross for an entire people with whom he remains faithful to the end. These pages cannot be summarized, and are often written like a sailor in deep despair tossing a bottle into the sea.”⁹¹

These “*Chroniques d'un témoin privilégié*” and Rahimi’s documentary movie *Nous avons partagé le pain et le sel* raised serious questions. The fate of many children turned sour, and their lives were threatened because the Soviet and Afghan authorities used all means, including these children, to force the Dominican friar out of the country. He was accused of being a spy for Western capitalist countries. One may question whether or not his earlier departure from Kabul would have prevented this disastrous outcome. His sense of hospitality for and solidarity with the people of Afghanistan created an ethical dilemma similar to the predicament of many religious men and women living among Muslims (or others for that matter) in time of war and civil unrest.⁹² In this case, the longer de Beaurecueil stayed in Kabul, the longer some of the youngsters suffered severely. He was torn apart between leaving the country and staying in solidarity with those he cared for deeply.

For many Christians, the example of Jesus of Nazareth and his words are the lynchpin for their choices. A verse such as “There is no greater love

than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn. 15:13) and the ethical demand to stay with the suffering other loom large. In his civil war diaries, de Beaurecueil meditates often on "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt. 5: 11–12).⁹³

Nevertheless, did the Dominican friar stay too long in Kabul because of a twisted savior complex or in the pursuit of martyrdom or holiness? Was he responsible for the ordeal of some of his protégés? In times of civil war, a decision to stay or leave is laden with unbearable consequences. Despite the horrible circumstances of his departure, he continued to work for the well-being of his Kabul children, and many of them found asylum in France. His sincerity and compassion were not a misplaced pursuit of holiness or martyrdom. The poverty and helplessness of Kabul street children were not an opportunity for a show but a tragedy to remedy.⁹⁴ He left heartbroken and felt guilty of betraying the very people he called his icons. He estimated that solidarity with the suffering other outweighs the risks. On August 23, 1983, a few days before his departure from Kabul, he sent a letter to a priest friend, Jean d'Auferville, in Leaz (France) to summarize the agony and tragic end of the *Maison d'Abraham*.

My dear Jean, it is agony. I have enough of sobbing all night long. I must leave, otherwise I will go mad. Six of my "children" were arrested and a seventh (sixteen) died a few days ago because of intestinal obstruction because of his parents' imprudence. Who is next? It seems that I am the source of their tragedies. Tell Georges that I joined the club of the wretched. The padar (father), the hero of the far away adventure is no more. I am alone and writing to you in tears. My dear Jean, I groan in the depth of the abyss. Tell all my friends to pray for me and to howl to the Lord on our behalf!⁹⁵

Obviously the Dominican friar shared equally the tragedy of his household, and this proves his sincerity and solidarity with the suffering other.

1. At the House of Abraham

Afghanistan Demain is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that was founded by Ehsān Mehrangais, one of de Beaurecueil’s “children,” in 2001 while the Taliban were in power. It is a proud heir of the life and work of de Beaurecueil in Kabul.⁹⁶ De Beaurecueil was the honorary president until his death in 2005. The organization seeks to perpetuate the spirit of the *Maison d’Abraham*, which was tragically interrupted by the Soviet invasion.⁹⁷ Mehrangais writes, “I established this NGO to help forsaken children and to continue father Serge de Beaurecueil’s legacy. He dedicated his life to help children in need with a spirit of tolerance.”⁹⁸ Faithful to de Beaurecueil’s legacy, the organization is devoted to feeding, clothing, educating, and providing health care to a number of children who live on and from the street of Kabul. This section focuses on de Beaurecueil’s eventful life in Kabul through his book *Mes enfants de Kabul*, which chronicles the legacy that *Afghanistan Demain* would like to perpetuate.

The stories of these children are intertwined with his journey. In Kabul, the Dominican friar experienced what it meant to rely on God’s providence (*tawakkul*), to trust the strangers or the religious other and to remain faithful to the Spirit of truth. In such a case, where doubt and interrogation crept in too easily, where adversity and dire poverty seemed connatural to the land, de Beaurecueil relied on signs to continue his journey. These signs were lampposts on the road, or the “monk’s lamp” with its glimmer that made the heart of a solitary traveler beat with gladness at the thought that through the unfathomable desert night, the fragile light was like the joyful sign of fraternal presence. His “children,” Ghāffar, Mirdād, Ehhsān, Zāher, Wahēd, Sultān, and so forth, were such lampposts.⁹⁹

His community in Kabul was put under the patronage of Abraham. De Beaurecueil paralleled his call to Abraham’s. As God summoned the patriarch to journey to the promised land (Gn. 12, 1), the Dominican friar believed he was as well led by God to the mountains of Afghanistan. Like Abraham, he did not know where the promised land was and when he would arrive. Like Abraham, he left his country, friends, and religious community to live elsewhere, and for him it meant to commune with a number of orphans and street children, sick and handicapped little ones in Kabul’s hospitals. As with Abraham, only God knew why and how the journey would unfold. He did not have a blueprint or a road map for

Kabul's adventure. Just as Ur and Harrān were just stages on the way to the promised land for Abraham, so were Paris and Cairo on the way to Kabul in his case. He notes:

All in all, I chose Abraham as the patron saint of our humble abode in Shār-é-Naw. Thirty years ago, I joined the Order of St. Dominic, and later heard father Chenu's talk about Egypt, and landed in the country in 1946. How would I have ever imagined that my Promised Land was farther away in the mountains of Central Asia? God led me step by step, and I now see clearly the itinerary. The meaning of my adventure, however, escapes me totally. Like Ur and Harrān, Paris and Cairo were just stages on the way, but filled with dear memories.¹⁰⁰

For a Dominican friar, his life experience in Kabul was not a given. He knew the preaching of the Gospel is irreducible to an institutional religious life or church organization. Many of the residents of the *Maison d'Abraham* were crippled by birth defects, malnutrition, neglect, abuse, and maltreatment. Many were abandoned and orphaned boys who slept in the public parks in warm weather or sought out doorways and boxes in winter. By strange coincidence and unusual circumstances, they arrived at the *Maison d'Abraham*, and a fictive kinship was formed between a friar and Muslim children.

His community was made of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazāra, Nuristani, and Baloch; some were Sunni, others Shī‘ī or Isma’īlī. What had become of his years of erudite scientific research on Islamic mysticism? He earned two doctorates and was appointed professor at the University of Kabul in 1962 to teach the history of Islamic mysticism and techniques of editing ancient manuscripts.¹⁰¹ He left research to teach at the University faculty, abandoned his position to teach in the secondary and primary schools, and later became an advisor and infirmarian to the little ones. No wonder unrelenting questions and doubts continued to plague his adventure. The following questions refused to go away: did he make the right decision; should he continue to care for orphans and handicapped and street children or return to his scholarly work on the Pīr of Herāt? Was he doing the right thing to gather Muslim boys from different religious and ethnic

backgrounds in his compound? After ten years in Kabul, he offered this grueling and honest examination of conscience:

I have always abhorred examination of conscience and one's life assessment. It is difficult to evaluate oneself truthfully. Often, we confess only that which is convenient, leaving in the shadow things that are too humiliating to admit. After all, to examine one's life presupposes that we control it and can dispose of it at will. Experience tells a different story. We are conditioned by many things out of our control. Nonetheless, after ten years with these children—visiting hospitals, giving up my scholarly endeavors, and letting my religious life go by the wayside—I question myself at times. I can easily rationalize things away—love for the poor (“let children come to me,” said the Gospel), open heart, the demands of life which force us to abandon what is secondary to attend to what matters, and the revolt of faith against institutional religion etc. ... It was equally easy even though less glorious to imagine the dark side—selfish satisfaction in helping others, making up for the paternity that I gave up, sublimation of a clumsy sadism, salvaging a failed vocation, negligence and unfaithfulness to prayer and sacramental practices, and the list goes on.¹⁰²

These heartwrenching questions are moments of examination of conscience but also of grace, places where the abode of Islam “evangelizes” his paternalism, orientalism, and Eurocentrism. What are the deep reasons that motived his obsession with Anṣārī and Afghanistan? His honesty is genuine, and one can only wish that many in similar circumstances will remain humble and not fall into a misguided savior complex. In the face of these seminal questions on which his entire life hung, two signs pointed the way. First, Ghaffār’s invitation to share bread and salt, and second, Anṣārī would provide the ultimate sign. This latter answer was reminiscent of Elijah’s experience in 1 Kings 19:12. Similar to Elijah, de Beaurecueil did not receive a boisterous and triumphant answer, but a whisper, a fleeting sign pointing to the right direction. Indeed, the last sign arrived in 1976. By that time, de Beaurecueil had since 1965 abandoned his erudite work on the master’s corpus of teachings and devoted himself solely to the education

and health care of Kabul street children. The nagging question was: should he continue to care for the well-being of his “children” or return to academia? The answer came on the commemoration of the millennium of the birth of Anṣārī. On that occasion, Beaurecueil had a chance to travel to the shrine of the master in Herāt. Dupré files this account:

In the early evening, which so often bathes Herāt in an unearthly light, Serge sat before the tomb of Anṣārī and closed his eyes to meditate. As reported later, he asked the questions which plagued him and demanded of Anṣārī: “O Pīr of Herāt, you brought me to Afghanistan. But what should I do now?” As he meditated, Serge became aware that all sounds of man and nature had died away. Silence! Then he opened his eyes. Sitting before him were two little boys, huddled together, contemplating this strange *khareji* (foreigner) who sat so respectfully in front of the tomb of Anṣārī. One of the boys, it turned out, claimed to be a direct descendant of the Khwāja ‘Abdullāh ‘Anṣārī, Pīr-i-Herāt.¹⁰³

De Beaurecueil believed in signs and saw in these little boys’ answer an indication that the master of Herat was in agreement with his life. Once again, no one can empirically observe and describe the veracity of his religious experience. According to him, his care for Kabul’s abandoned and poor children did not distance him from mysticism or betray his master. His daily work at Lycée Isteqlāl, visits to hospitals, sharing bread and salt, and the tedious routine of living with children were all signs of faithfulness to the essentials. The Dominican friar turned *padar* could then write at the end of his book:

These children that you heard about are a few among many others in Kabul. They were sent my way by Providence to share my journey. You saw them arrive after many trials and misery. You watched them join the household and become part of the family where they grow together and experience joy in spite of the vicissitudes of life, revolution and civil war. “The glory of God is the human being fully alive,” said St. Ireneus. I told you the story of these children which is also mine as well.¹⁰⁴

Ironically, it was in the land of Islam that the word *padar*, father or *père*, made complete sense. In the Muslim world, the attribution of the title of father to a celibate man was an oddity. But it was in Kabul that everyone called de Beaurecueil *padar*. Muslims as well as his French friends and other foreigners use the same word; for the former, he was the *padar* of the *Maison d'Abraham*, and for the latter he was a priest and a friar. One of his “children,” Mirdād, who joined the compound at a very young age and never knew any other father figure than the Dominican priest, took *Pedari* as his last name. For his colleagues at school, his neighbors, the physicians at the hospital such as Dr. Rahimi and Gaush, and the Little Sisters of Jesus, de Beaurecueil was the *padar* in both the human and spiritual senses. People recognized in him the role of a father—a spiritual father but also a father who provided for his adoptive children. In a society where it was unacceptable to call God a father, the people of Kabul saw in him a man of God and a sign of God’s mercy on these children. Each year many children came, some stayed as they needed to, some longer, some for a brief visit. Many went to school for the first time in their lives. They learned to walk again, were cured of debilitating disease, and many went on to have careers. He did not perform miracles, but thanks to an enduring work, what Jules Monchanin called “*une patience géologique*” (a monumental patience), and God’s providence a number of Kabul orphans and street children made a life for themselves.

At any rate, when he met a distraught child on a street or in a hospital, he was moved to act.¹⁰⁵ Hence, at the *Maison d'Abraham* children arrived unannounced. He would be the first to recognize that children are not easy but nothing could impede his enthusiasm. On the contrary, these children were his icons, divine signs who always arrived on a symbolic day: the feast of St. Dominic, the anniversaries of his solemn profession, his ordination, and so forth. There were enough anniversary dates to welcome them any day of the week and enough room and food to accommodate them. In Rahimi’s documentary, he said, “[C]hildren must be loved and respected, they are the very face of God, Christ promised the reign of God to them, they are my icons, and each one of them is a mystery, a history and a poem.”¹⁰⁶

2. *These Little Ones Are My Icons*

In his documentary, Rahimi tracks the journey of a few former residents of the *Maison d'Abraham* who now live in France or between Kabul and Paris. The movie portrays well their unique adventures and fate but underlines their common struggles. The lot of a dire life and the misery of a childhood are transformed through time into a meaningful human life. Their stories mingle with the Dominican friar's religious journey and give birth to deeply moving biographies. In *My Children of Kabul*, he recounts the biographies of children whose lives went unnoticed. Different and unique, they were all called to share a destiny and a journey that they could not imagine. The reasons were beyond all of them, but to the best of their know-how, and out of their enthusiasm and hospitality, they wrote redemptive stories about the House of Abraham.

Among his children, de Beaurecueil liked to start with Ghaffār, who never lived in the house but initiated the movement and provided a theological raison d'être for his adventure. The second one was Del-Agha, then Rassul, "marvelous and yet unbearable,"¹⁰⁷ arrived to keep Del-Agha company. Del-Agha was Tajik and Sunni, but Rassul was Hazāra and Shī'ah. The cook Babā Golāb, a Sunni Pashtun, could not see himself attending to a Shī'ah Hazāra, who was considered as being an inferior class. These ethnic and sectarian conflicts and their subsequent resolution point to the possibility of a peaceful coexistence among religions and ethnic groups. Mirdād was perhaps the dearest child who stayed with the *padar*.¹⁰⁸ When he was sent to school and was asked his father's name, he replied: "de Beaurecueil." Because of his closeness to de Beaurecueil, he was imprisoned and tortured by Afghan secret service agents during the Russian invasion. The authorities sought to use him as a means to incriminate de Beaurecueil. His story is the most emotional, and he is the living example of the Dominican friar's success story in Kabul.¹⁰⁹ The list goes on with Ibrahim, Cher-Agha, Besmellāh, Mohad Ali, Akbar Saoz, Reza, and many others. They came from Herāt, Bāmiān, Panjchīr, Ghazni, Jalālabad, Nuristān, and so forth. There were many stories of tragedy and misfortune, particularly during the civil wars, but also enduring stories of children whose lives turned out better because of the *Maison d'Abraham*. It was just a handful of Kabul children. One might argue that it was a drop in the ocean of poverty and neglect, of course, but for these children, the *padar* made all the difference in their lives.

De Beaurecueil's life in Kabul was not only about his hospitality toward the Afghan but also the Afghan generosity to a Christian who lived as one of them. He tried with the help of his Muslim neighbors to live the Gospel. Thousands of miles away from his country, in a forsaken land where people are poor and the landscape is austere and yet breathtaking, a unique love affair blossomed between them and the Dominican friar. He was a fool for God among Muslims, and his children gave him a sense of human and spiritual paternity that he could have never dreamt of. In calling him *padar*, the Afghan recognized in him shared human and religious values. They welcomed him and taught him to see with new eyes, and he recognized them as members of the reign of God, to use a Christian term. His life echoed Christian Duquoc's insightful reading of Jesus of Nazareth's life and ministry:

The dominion of Christ points to Jesus of Nazareth, who chose in his life to relinquish hegemonic imagination and to assume the risk of fragile justice and discrete love. He deemed this withdrawal from power more beneficial to people. The Resurrected, through the gift of the Spirit, invites the Church and Christians to walk a similar path, which scorns deceptive optimism, and opens to a lucid and solid hope. Such a hope builds on faith which overcomes doubts engendered by a dimmed vision of the reign of God.¹¹⁰

De Beaurecueil's was a journey characterized not by a systematic speculation on religious life or the elaboration of a theoretical framework within which all elements of a Dominican life can be explained and situated in relationship to each other and to the whole. His pastoral mysticism assigned priority to experience rather than allowing theological conjecture to prescribe and limit his ministry, because experience enjoys a real priority over theory in relation to life. The adventure at *Maison d'Abraham* was not governed by logical necessity but by contingency, and at times it seemed chaotic and meaningless. He acknowledged the historical character of his religious life and therefore the real limitations of human freedom. As S. Schneiders, a scholar and religious women herself, sees it, "it is a sure instinct for the real nature of religious life which is not a static essence to be

described and analyzed but first and foremost a life to be lived, an historical reality which is ever-changing and unpredictable.”¹¹¹

His religious life did not start with definitions, laws, propositions, or his erudition in Islamic mysticism. He tended to examine his lived experience and tried to express its significance through his daily encounter with Afghans. He abandoned exclusive and triumphant theologies for an articulation of religious life in dynamic, evangelical terms. He tested the validity of theories about religious life by their adequacy to his experience among Muslims. His *praxis mystica* itself was tested against the Gospel criterion: “By their fruits you shall know them.” (Mt. 7:20)

In Kabul from 1963 to 1983, and despite the ups and downs, de Beaurecueil’s experience embodied a Christian solidarity with Muslims, a fidelity to the Gospel’s ideals of equality and simplicity, a repudiation of elitism and the privileges of pseudo-clericalism. Among Muslims, he experienced the sacred not so much in high Christology (Eucharistic celebration, silent meditations, and a daily horarium) but in simple and mundane human gestures. He shared bread and salt, attended and nursed a child to health, listened to, taught and admonished another one, laughed and cried with their families. It was the realization of the unfathomable presence of God in the terribleness of daily life. In Kabul, he understood what it really meant to rely on God’s providence, *tawakkul*, and to surrender the future to God’s will.¹¹²

This chapter concludes de Beaurecueil’s spiritual path and presents the result of a lifelong journey from Aristocratic Catholic France to Afghanistan. The Dominican friar’s life and work testifies to the transformative power of hospitality given to and received from the Muslim other. He managed to live a Christian religious life among Muslims and was open to the signs of the times. His radical belief in the power of the Spirit to guide and lead his actions sustained him. He befriended people of goodwill regardless of religion and culture. Many in the French community of Kabul were atheists and agnostics. They were, however, closer to him than many of his own Dominicans brothers.¹¹³ Ultimately, this was an attempt to appreciate the gifts of the Muslim Other religiously and culturally. He left his birthplace to go to share bread and salt, to meet God in the Afghans, to intercede and substitute for them, to find and build a family.

Conclusion

Initial

Out of infinite longings rise
finite deeds like weak fountains
falling back just in time and trembling.
And yet, what otherwise remains silent,
our happy energies—show themselves
in these dancing tears.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Book of Images* (1902)
(trans. Cliff Crego)¹

In *Doing the Truth in Love*, Michael Himes confesses, “theology: that of which we cannot speak.”² As Himes understands it, theologians and mystics stand between two poles. The first pole is expressed in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s conclusion in *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, “Of that about which we can say nothing, let us keep silent,”³ and the second one is described by T. S. Eliot, “There are some things about which nothing can be said and before which we dare not keep silence.”⁴ Between these two poles lies theological and mystical endeavor. In de Beaurecueil’s case, it was an attempt to square this theological circle: to live an authentic Roman Catholic religious life in the midst of Muslims.⁵ It seems that he stands remarkably well between those two poles as a mystic and a prophet. According to William Ernest Hocking:

The prophet is but a mystic in control of the forces of history,
declaring their necessary outcome: the mystic in action is the

prophet. In the prophet, the cognitive certainty becomes historic and particular; and this is the necessary destiny of that certainty: mystical experience must complete itself in prophetic consciousness.⁶

The interplay of mystical and prophetic elements is found in the lives of several outstanding Dominican friars, and de Beaurecueil belongs to this lineage.⁷ In the examples of these friars, the essential unknowability of God embraces the imperative of a loving ministry. The life and religious praxis of de Beaurecueil is congruent with the Dominican tradition and spirituality, which necessarily includes prayer and study, material and spiritual poverty, the primacy of Truth, and contemplation expressed in active service to others. This latter aspect, known as *Contemplata aliis tradere* (to hand on to others what has been contemplated), is the *praxis mystica* of the Dominican friar Richard Woods. Woods explains:

Drawn from the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, the gnomic phrase [*Contemplata aliis tradere*] is meant not to distinguish the mystical, contemplative dimension of Dominican spirituality from its active expression, but to unite them. Nor are they related as a means to an end: they form one goal.⁸

The burden of this book was to try to fill a lacuna in the literature devoted to the mystical approaches to Christian-Muslim relations. De Beaurecueil's scholarship was a meditation on a master-teacher relation like that of Massignon and al-Ḥallāj and on the hidden and abiding presence of God in the midst of incommensurable differences. His life journey points to the transformative role of Islam and Muslims for Christian discipleship. In the abode of Islam, this Christian life given to the study of the mystical dimensions of Islam experienced a conversion of his orthopraxy and worldview. He learned to allow the religious other to speak as other without assimilating him or her to the category of sameness. The context of otherness in Kabul ushered in a different way of living an authentic *praxis mystica*, and the children at the House of Abraham opened an unexpected widow, a ministry of hospitality to and from the Muslim other.

The four chapters of this book have examined the spiritual and intellectual encounter of two mystics who lived almost a millennium apart in totally different cultures, religious traditions, and continents. The scholarship of a contemporary Dominican friar about the life and works of a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī of the eleventh century Herāt is the thrust of this book. This study shows the invaluable (yet neglected) contribution of de Beaurecueil to the Dominican tradition of Islamic studies and offers a meditation on a mystical approach to the religious other. On the one hand, de Beaurecueil's life is a faith journey lived from the location of weakness, otherness, and a constant effort to understand his faith in light of the religious other. On the other hand, his life was the locus of Christian-Muslim theological conundrums. He lived every aspect of the challenges, differences, and incompatibilities of the two faith traditions.⁹ Above all, Islam and Muslims serve as the crucible of his scholarship and the ground on which his Christian discipleship drew nourishment and bore fruit. In the abode of Islam, he discovered the sacred meaning of hospitality given and received. Massignon calls it "a holy hospitality."

According to Christian Duquoc (d. 2008), there are four major challenges of Islam for Christianity:

- 1) The advent of Islam as a post-Christian religion justifies its claim to be the last historically revealed religion;
- 2) The radical monotheism of Islam rejects the incarnation of the biblical God in history;
- 3) The dogmatic and moral simplicity of Islam breaks with the complexity of Christian doctrines;
- 4) Modernity: individual versus community: a controversial challenge.¹⁰

Duquoc suggests that these challenges are not assaults on Christianity and Western modernity, but rather deeply disturbing questions to wrestle with. In an odd way, these challenges are the gifts of the Muslim other to Christian theological and mystical imagination. This study offers an example of how a Dominican mystic and an erudite orientalist appropriated this gift of the religious other, the gift of *dār al Islam* to Christian *praxis mystic*. De Beaurecueil offers an approach that could energize a timid

Roman Catholic theology of religions that also seems out of stamina and rekindle “Christian-Muslim dialogue in a world gone religiously awry,” as David Burrell puts it.¹¹

The narratives of both Anṣārī’s and de Beaurecueil’s lives in the first two chapters shed light on the complex reasons and circumstantial events at the roots of the friar’s scholarship: his journey from aristocratic Catholic France to Cairo and to the mountains of Afghanistan, where he lived his Christian discipleship and Dominican life. In addition, these biographies present the eventful life of a Ṣūfī master and paint the pictures of two deeply religious men whose lives transcend time and defy incommensurable differences. These first two chapters also till the soil for the spiritual affinities and master-disciple relationships. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on de Beaurecueil’s own intellectual and mystical growth. Furthermore, these two men of God offer a glimpse into the mystical legacy of their respective faith traditions.¹² Their lives call to mind Rabindranath Tagore’s poem “Little Flute”:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail
vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with
fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales,
and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its
limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of
mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is
room to fill.¹³

The two mystics teach us that what is most universal is at the same time most particular. Hegel called this phenomenon “the concrete universal.”¹⁴ The concrete universal is a principle that necessarily has universal import and at the same time is concrete by virtue of its historical situation. Mysticism is of this nature because it belongs to all religious traditions, and every mystical path (*tariqa*) is tied to a particular moment, an age, and even a person. There are what one might call moments of mystical paths in history. One could also borrow the title of Fakhr al-dīn ‘Irāqī’s book and

call these moments “divine flashes”¹⁵ or, to use T. S. Eliot’s luminous phrase, “a raid on the inarticulate.”¹⁶ These phrases characterize accurately the lives of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil. It is not far-fetched to think of them as moments of mystical encounters. Both mystics were expressions of the universal human search for union with God and also of complete obedience to the divine path in their particular religious traditions. They were among those who took seriously their religious traditions and fully understood the status of humanity as standing before God. “Be still and know that I am God,” we read in Psalm 46:10.¹⁷

The Dominican friar refused to buy into the dichotomies of knowledge and experience/practice. Reza Sha-Kazemi believes that Islamic spirituality (or the mystical dimensions of Islam) could prevent Islamic tradition from becoming mere ideology and turning to violence. Reza Shah-Kazemi goes further and identifies in Islamic spirituality or mysticism the dimension that prevents religion from becoming mere ideology and turning into violence. He argues that the vital state of religious life and discourse is proportional to the profound spiritual consciousness within its fold. He writes:

It is spirituality, we believe, that reveals, more effectively than any other aspect of the Islamic tradition, the reductionism inherent in the attempt to ideologize and politicize the message of the Qur’ān. For it is precisely when the spiritual appreciation of Revelation is weak, that its message becomes susceptible to ideological distortion. There is a clear relationship between the decline of spirituality and the rise of ideology, in Islam as in other religions; and it would not be going too far to say that, deprived of a living spirituality at its core, Islam will inevitably be reduced to an empty shell, the vacuum within soon becoming filled with worldliness in all its guises: its revealed text becomes an ideological pretext; morally reforming oneself gives way to violently rectifying the other; spiritual contemplation is scorned in favour of political machination; the subtleties of revelation become submerged by exigencies of revolution.¹⁸

Despite their human failures, one could argue that these two mystics at the center of this study are like parables in Christian terms, or *koans* in Zen

Buddhism. Their lives are paths to truth because they lead our minds and eyes to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and dreadfulness of everyday life. They struggle, like Jacob against the angel of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, to embody a genuine path to the divine and an authentic taste of the unfathomable presence of God. De Beaurecueil's mystical perspective is a genuine investigation of the foundations of the philosophical and theological ground of both Christianity and Islam at a particular time. Such an endeavor avoids religious exclusion and alienation and fosters a deeper appreciation of the gift of other religions.

Faithful to the motto of the Dominican Order, *Veritas*, de Beaurecueil's lifetime search for the Truth is the blueprint of this study. He remarks correctly, "I do not believe that I possess the Truth that could hand down to others from my superior position. I only wish to walk toward the Truth with and often through others; step by step in order that She possesses me."¹⁹ *Veritas*, "Truth," inscribed in the Dominican seal summarizes the goal and ideal of the Order. *Veritas* is not a narrow philosophical, much less semantic, notion of verbal accuracy, but it means the whole range of divine and human Reality and the process of seeking illusive truth. For Dominicans, the chief instance and perfect exemplar remains the Eternal Truth, expressed substantially and historically in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of faith.²⁰

Mystics often are good examples of what the search for the ultimate Truth is all about. De Beaurecueil's life witnesses to a possibility of two faith traditions as well as two cultures and civilizations: Persian-Arabic and western European, learning, enriching, and challenging each other without distorting and denigrating the other. The Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī, Anṣārī, lured the French Dominican priest to settle in Afghanistan for twenty years. De Beaurecueil met Anṣārī on mystical ground. The Pīr of Herāt schooled the Frenchman through the mystical experiences of the unfathomable. His mystical path blossomed when he entered in conversation with the mystical writings of Anṣārī. The quality of the relationship between the Dominican friar and Anṣārī is strikingly similar to Massignon's description of his engagement with al-Ḥallāj. Massignon writes, "Not that the study of his life [al-Ḥallāj], which was full and strong, upright and whole, rising and giving has yielded to me the secret of his heart. It is rather he [al-Ḥallāj] who has fathomed mine and who probes it still."²¹ In this sense, al-Ḥallāj was for

Massignon what Anṣārī was for de Beaurecueil. Similar to Massignon and many others, de Beaurecueil opened a door for many to pass through and to find a real approach and technique of dialogue with the religious other. De Beaurecueil transmitted Anṣārī's thought and mystical wisdom. The Dominican friar's life was a doorway and a finger pointing beyond himself and perhaps to what interfaith encounter really means.

De Beaurecueil enters into dialogue as a host or a guest without presumptions of knowledge or aspirations to possess the right faith tradition. Dialogue requires recognition of one's own limitations and sincere respect shown to others' differences. De Beaurecueil did not live in two worlds, Islam and Christianity; within himself there was not a wall dividing the one from the other. Interfaith dialogue engages us beyond ourselves and often includes the undertaking of apparently hopeless journeys made to and with distant friends. Dialogue witnesses to alternative human capacities such as compassion, moral integrity against brutality, and indifference to suffering. The radical respect for the religious other shown by de Beaurecueil and many others is one of the most precious fruits of realized kindredness that began in dialogue. Genuine dialogue does not shy away from moral rage. It may indeed be a necessary condition of the larger dialogue for such souls: rage on the other's behalf, rage for truth, rage for justice, in the self-consuming spirit of compassion. These prophets of dialogue went further than most in discovering and sharing a larger worldview than their own.

Like the olive tree roots itself in the ground, Serge never left his childhood. From this well, he drew nourishment and bore fruit. In addition, he kept his childhood's fantasy and freedom.”²² André Gouzes, one of de Beaurecueil's closest friends and confrères, sees in de Beaurecueil's life the freedom and the carefree characteristics of a child. As discussed in the introduction, his unwavering determination to travel to a faraway land and later abandon erudite scholarship for the welfare of Kabul's street children harkens back to his own childhood.²³ In that case, Jacques Lacan's famous phrase “the child is the father of the man” (*l'enfant est le père de l'homme*) seems to explain some aspects of his religious adventure. Pérennès reminds us that de Beaurecueil read closely Dostoevsky's work, in which he paid a keen attention to the “scandal of children's suffering and pain.” In 1954, he gave a series of lectures at the *Alliance française* of Ismaīlia in Cairo, and

one of them was titled “Children in Dostoevsky’s work” (*Présence des enfants dans l’œuvre de Dostoevsky*).²⁴

In addition, from *Crime and Punishment*, de Beaurecueil took the following lines seriously: “children are the very face of Christ. The reign of God belongs to them. Jesus calls us to respect and love them. They are the future of humanity.”²⁵ His whole life was full of instances of extraordinary care for children in pain. At Saint-Fargeau, he ministered to children with poliomyelitis; in Cairo, he befriended Taïssir Tatio, who was seriously handicapped, and later took Alain-Ammanuel Tagher, a ten-year-old Lebanese boy, to Lourdes to pray for healing. In Kabul, he dedicated most of his ministry to children plagued by numerous ailments. Upon his return from Afghanistan, he befriended Lawry, who suffered from a debilitating pulmonary disease, and François, who was lonely and fatherless.²⁶ He was moved by children’s endurance of unbearable pain and at the same time their capability to radiating inexplicable joy. In my view, here lies the source of his own joy and enthusiasm for children’s welfare, and not only his own childhood pain. In an article written on his seventieth birthday, he betrayed the secret of his inner joy, which illuminates his care for the little ones among us. He wrote:

Amazement! Indeed, the morning Star has never ceased to light my way, even during the darkest hours of my life. Often, She illumines my path through the radiant face of children, icons of Jesus revealing His presence at once. I encounter God on the corner, but He disguises himself in order to surprise and to leave me bewildered before His radiant beauty. For example, God glows in Jerome’s smile. God is shining in Lawry’s eyes. God is afflicted and covered with pustules under Olivier’s body ... God looks nothing like what we often think. God is playing at hide-and-seek like a child for the sake of surprising us, and like the morning Star, He appears suddenly at night.

Laughter! In the face of all the tricks He plays with me, and sometimes He makes me walk blind sighted to be amused by my surprises. I dreamt to go far away and I was heard beyond my expectation: seventeen years in Cairo, twenty in Afghanistan, without mentioning my catastrophic return back to square one where other adventures awaited me. God of humor and

tenderness; God of laughter, you make us laugh when we are tempted to cry; God of the good news, God of liberty.

The universe! What a magnificent circuit, which is illumined by galaxies where God plays the clown for all the children of the earth, including you and I, who are created out of love and in His image and likeness. What a bundle of eternal joy!²⁷

One could even suggest that the Dominican friar shares with his master a similar childhood experience. Indeed, around the age of ten, Anṣārī's father left Herāt to return to his previous ascetic life in Balkh. Likewise, at the age of fourteen, de Beaurecueil's parents divorced. Both Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil shared a childhood experience of being abandoned, and that might explain part of the friar's connection to his master. Nevertheless, one would be hard pressed to find an explicit reference in de Beaurecueil's writings to such a connection. In the end, one can do no more than speculate about their childhood connection, and speculation is no ground for judgment. Thus, the evidence seems simply circumstantial and too thin to warrant further investigation. It is rather the mystical affinities that are obvious through his entire life. Over half a century, de Beaurecueil's human, intellectual, and spiritual journeys were a long walk to a promised land he could not imagine possible. However, the abrupt end of his Afghan journey underlines the utter fragility of every human dream. As it is so often the case, despite our intentions, none of us is the master of our own life trajectory. The unfathomable divine freedom explains it all. The path he trod remains unique, and even though no other friar has followed his footsteps thus far, his example is very compelling, and his spiritual and intellectual journeys can be summarized as follows:

Nevertheless, I have made the attempt. I have done so because these persons captured my attention and fascinated me from the first moment I encountered them. Reading their words, I have had the strange experience of something at one and the same new and strange, and yet familiar. I have looked into the face of a stranger, and found a friend. I have encountered sayings that have forced me to think afresh about my own faith, I have seen rays from a source of light that I know well, though here refracted through a new prism.²⁸

Notes

Introduction

1. Kenneth Cragg, “The Hinge and the Lock,” *MW* 47 (1957): 269.
2. The Dominican Order, also known as the Order of Preachers, is a Roman Catholic religious community founded in 1216. Shortly after the establishment of the Order, many Dominican friars were involved with Islam and the Muslim worlds for various reasons. The tradition continues to this day.
3. See [chapter 2](#) for a biography of Anṣārī.
4. IDEO (l’Institut Dominicain des Etudes Orientales) du Caire. See [chapter 2](#) for a history of the institute.
5. Kenneth Cragg, “The Hinge and the Lock,” *MW* 47 (1957): 269.
6. See [chapter 2](#) for a complete biography of the master of Herat.
7. A parallel case is Louis Massignon (d. 1962) and Manṣur al-Ḥallāj (d. 922). See also Phillip C. Naylor’s “Bishop Pierre Claverie and the Risk of Religious Reconciliation,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (2010): 720–42; Jean-Jacques Perénnès, *Pierre Claverie: un Algérien par alliance* (Paris: Cerf, 2000); Maurice Borrmans, *Prophètes du dialogue islamо-chrétien* (Paris: Cerf, 2009). Also see Atiq Rahim’s documentary film “*Nous avons partagé le pain et le sel*” based on de Beaurecueil’s life in Kabul and Xavier Beauvois’s “Des dieux et des hommes” concerning the tragic death of the seven Trappist monks of Tibherine in 1996.
8. See Jean Jacques Perénnès, OP, *Serge de Beaurecueil: Kaboul, 20 ans d’amour et de Bonheur* (Paris: Cerf, 2014).
9. Dominican spirituality is understood as “*contemplata aliis tradere*,” meaning to hand over the fruits of one’s contemplation.
10. Jean-Jacques Perénnès, *Passion de Kaboul: le père Serge de Beaurecueil* (Paris: Cerf, 2014).
11. *Christian Lives Given to the Study of Islam*, ed. Christian Troll, SJ and C. T. R. Hewer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).
See studies on the life and work of Louis Massignon, Henri Corbon, Charles de Foucauld, Pierre Claverie, Jean Mohammed Abd el Jalil, and many more.
12. Jacque Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2001), 158.
13. I am referring to Christian Eurocentrism, Christocentrism, and ecclesiocentrism.
14. Massignon believes that Islam’s fundamental role is to call Christians back to radical monotheism.

¹⁵ Massignon and his disciples and Henri Corbin are a few dissenting voices. They took Islam very seriously and often suffered harsh criticism from their fellow Christians.

¹⁶ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (1960; reprint, London: Oneworld, 2009).) See also John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval Europe Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); *Sons of Ishamel: Muslims Through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Miami: University Press of Florida, 2008); and of course Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [reprint]).

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Pérennès, *Georges Anawati (1905–1994): Un Chrétien Egyptien devant le mystère de l’Islam* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 64.

¹⁸ Quoted in Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 9.

¹⁹ See David Barrell, *Toward a Jewish, Christian and Muslim Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

²⁰ See books by Maurice Borrmans, Herbert Mason, and Youakim Mourak on L. Massignon; René Voillaume on Charles de Foucauld; Jean Jacques Pérennès on Pierre Claverie; the literature on the tragic death of the Trappist monks in Algeria, and so forth. Many of these books are a tribute to Christianity where Islam and Muslims serve as a means to martyrdom and sainthood. See studies on the life and work of Louis Massignon, Henri Corbin, Charles de Foucauld, Pierre Claverie, Jean Mohammed Abd el Jalil, and many more.

²¹ Robert Caspar, “Muslim Mysticism: Tendencies in Recent Research,” in *Studies on Islam*, ed. Merlin L. Swartz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 178.

²² See *Louis Massignon: Opera Minora*. 4 vols. Collected texts presented by Youakim Moubarac (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963); Youakim Moubarac, *L’oeuvre de Louis Massignon* (Beyrouth: Édition du Cénacle Libanais, 1972); Herbert Mason, *Memoir of a Friend: Louis Massignon* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1988); *Massignon: chronique d’une amitié* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990); and *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1989); Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Journal Books, 2003); Partick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guénon and Schuon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010); Maurice Borrmann, *Prophètes du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien: Louis Massignon, Jean-Mohammed Abd el-Jalil, Louis Gardet, Georges C. Anawati* (Paris: Cerf, 2009).

²³ This study is not interested in the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism, nor in trying to solve the quarrels of Catholic theologies of religions. The thought of Karl Rahner, Jacques Dupuis, Claude Geffré, John Hick, Paul Knitter, Gavin D’Costa, and Michael Barnes, to name but a few, will be equally useful.

²⁴ The Gospel narratives have very little to nothing to say about Jesus’s life in Nazareth prior to his public ministry. Apart from the infancy narrative in Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels, Christians have no record of the life of Jesus after the temple incident at the age of twelve. Charles de Foucauld calls this missing narrative “the hidden life of Jesus.” De Foucauld believed that his life among Muslims in Algeria emulated the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth before his public ministry.

²⁵ A question I borrow from Michael Barnes.

²⁶ Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 14.

²⁷ Martin Jay, *Adorno*. 15.

²⁸ Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 8.

²⁹ See Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

³⁰ Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 8.

³¹ Barnes, *Theology and Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21 and 22.

³² Barnes, *Theology*, 54.

33. Barnes, *Theology*, 22.
34. Barnes, *Theology*, 16.
35. Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 132.
36. Timothy Winter, “Islam and the Threat of Europe,” *World Faiths Encounter* 29 (2001): 7.
37. Khaled Abou el-Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 93.
38. *The Religious Other*, ed. Muḥammad Suheyl Umar (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008), iv.
39. Rahner, “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,” in *Theological Investigations* 5 (1966): 3–22. In this article, Rahner uses the controversial term “Anonymous Christians” for the first time, and he asks “what reason should I have for not being a Christian, if Christianity means taking possession of the mystery of man with absolute optimism?” See an excellent defense of Rahner’s idea by Gavin D’Costa, “Karl Rahner’s Anonymous Christian—A Reappraisal,” *Modern Theology* 1/2 (1985): 131–48.
40. See Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).
41. Barnes, *Theology*, 12.
42. Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 4.
43. Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21. Loughlin is commenting on Millbank’s use of Augustine’s musical metaphors to explain the singularity of Christian community. However, the question of how such a harmony may be achieved is left open. See Millbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” *Modern Theology* 7, no. 3 (1991): 223–37.
44. Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 4.
45. David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991), 98.
46. Barnes, *Theology*, 28.
47. Derrida, *A Dieu*, 79 (emphasis added by Derrida himself).
48. Claude Greffré, “Le pluralisme religieux comme un paradigme théologique,” *Croire et interpréter, le tournant herméneutique de la théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 90–109.
49. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letter to a Young Poet* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 25.
50. Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim’s View of Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 3.
51. Mohammad Hassan Khalil, *Islam and the Faith of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 145.
52. Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (Westport, CT: Pir Publications, 1994), 1.
53. T. S. Eliot, “East Coker,” in *The Four Quartets* (London: Mariner Books, 1968), 16.
54. T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* (London: Mariner Books, 1968), 16.
55. The Perennialist School believes that all faith traditions share a single and universal truth on which the foundation of all religious knowledge and doctrines are based.
56. For a study of these two lineages, see Patrick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).
57. *Munājāt: Cris du cœur*, trans. Serge de Beaurecueil (Paris: Sindbad, 1988).
58. Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 27.

Chapter 1

1. This epigraph summarizes the foundational ethos of the IDEO, quoted in Regis Morelon, “L’IDEO et ses institutions fondatrices sur la relation à l’Islam,” *Mémoire Dominicaine* 15 (2001):

137–216; and “In Memoriam: le Père M. D. Chenu,” *MIDEO* 20 (1991): 521–27 (Texte de Marie Dominique Chenu au conseil provincial de la province de France, Octobre 1945). Also see “Le Père Georges Anawati, o.p.,” *Arab Press Center* (1996): 19–40.

2. The IDEO was officially established on March 7, 1953, and the *MIDEO (Mélanges de l'IDEO)* was first published in 1954. Informally, the IDEO started in 1944–45, but since 1938, Chenu and Cardinal E. Tisserant have written the charter of the institution. See Morelon, “L’IDEO du Caire,” *Mémoire Dominicaine* 15 (2001): 52–27.

3. Dominique Avon, *Les frères prêcheurs en Orient* (Paris: Cerf, 205), 722.

4. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 12.

5. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 13.

6. Pérennès, “*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*,” 1.

7. The last chapter deals with his life in Kabul.

8. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 13.

9. Pérennès, *Serge de Beaurecueil*, 7.

10. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129.

11. See Jean Jacques Pérennès, Dominique Avon, Jean Velter, and many articles published after his death. His experience in Kabul seems to overshadow the rest of his life. Likewise, Envoyé Special, the French counterpart of American CBS’s *60 Minutes*, documented his return to Kabul under the title “the priest of Kabul.” A. Rahim’s movie *We Share Bread and Salt* falls under the same impression.

12. See Bruno Cadore’s preface in *Passion de Kaboul*.

13. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14.

14. In 1955, on his way to Kabul, he arrived in India, his childhood dream. He could not help but see in this childlike dream a sign of God’s hand leading and guiding him to his promised land, Afghanistan.

15. De Beaurecueil, “*La vie comme aventure*,” 1.

16. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 128.

17. De Beaurecueil, “*La vie comme aventure*,” 2.

18. See *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1991).

19. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14.

20. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14–15.

21. De Beaurecueil, “*La vie come aventure*,” 2.

22. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 15.

23. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 15. (In various faith traditions around the world, the habit is a particular garb worn by members of religious Orders or monastic communities as their regular attire and/or for liturgical reasons.)

24. Velter, “La disparition de Serge,” accessed October 13, 2010, <http://www.Poezibaotypepad.com/poezibao/2005/la-disparition.html>.

25. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14.

26. The best book on Le Saulchoir is Marie Dominique Chenu, *Une école de Théologie: Le Saulchoir* (Paris: Cerf, 1985). See also Avon, *Les frères*, 184–86.

27. Emile Combes was prime minister of France from 1902 to 1905. The famous Law of 1905 that organized the relationship between the Church and the State was voted into law by his government.

28. Jean-Baptiste Henry Lacordaire (d. 1861) reestablished the Dominican Order in France in 1837 after the Revolution of 1789. The Dominican Province of Paris established its first priory in 1865 in Flavigny (Côte-d’Or). But in 1884, the Dominicans moved the priory to Corbara (Corsica) and returned to Flavigny ten years later in 1894, where they remained until their expulsion. In 1903, the history of Le Saulchoir started. At the *studium generale* of Le Saulchoir, the French Dominicans

established the departments of philosophy and theology, and by 1937 there were 22 professors and 125 students. See Chenu, *Une école*, 7.

29. See a remarkable book on the major figures of Le Saulchoir. Thomas F. O'Meara and Paul Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times* (Aldelaide, South Australia: ATF Ltd., 2013). The book is a tribute to major French Dominicans who have deeply influenced Catholic theological and pastoral imagination in the twentieth century.

30. See H. D. Gardeil, *L'oeuvre théologique du Père Ambroise Gardeil* (Le Saulchoir: Etoilles par Soisy-sur Seine, 1956); also Ambroise Gardeil, *Le donné révélé et la théologie* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1910); Pierre Mandonnet, “Des écrits authentiques de St. Thomas d’Aquin,” *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes* 72, no. 1 (1911): 133–35; and “Saint Dominique: l’idée, l’homme et l’œuvre,” *Revue d’Histoire de l’Église de France* 25, no. 106 (1939): 50–53; also Pierre Mandonnet and Jean Destrez, *Bibliographie thomiste* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960).

31. Jean-Pierre Josua, *Le père Congar: la théologie au service du peuple de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 17. See also Henri-Dominique Gardeil, *L’Oeuvre théologique du père Ambroise Gardeil* (Etoilles: Le Saulchoir, 1956).

32. Chenu, *Une école*, 40. See also M. Quinsinky, “Echos Allemands à Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir de M. D. Chenu,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (janvier–mars 2010): 121–32.

33. Olivier de la Brosse, *Le père Chenu: la liberté dans la foi* (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 24.

34. De la Brosse, *Le père Chenu*, 23.

35. O’Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times*, xvii.

36. See the following books by Chenu: *Introduction à l’étude de St. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950); *St. Thomas d’Aquin et la théologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1959); *La théologie au 12e siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957); *La théologie comme science au 13e siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1943); *La théologie est-elle une science?* (Paris: Fayard, 1957).

37. O’Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times*, xvii.

38. O’Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times*, 1–16. See also Françoise Jacquin, *Jules Monchanin Prêtre 1895–1957* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 27.

39. O’Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times*, 22.

40. The *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* is a quarterly review published with the assistance of the CNRS and Le Centre National du Livre and edited by the Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin. The French Dominicans still run this century-old review. Today, many institutions continue the work of Le Saulchoir, such as the ecumenical center *Istina*, the Leonine Commission, the Provincial Archives, the Library of Le Saulchoir, and the *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* and the Editions du Cerf.

41. Chenu, *Une école*, 36; Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 56.

42. Yves Congar was already deeply involved with ecumenical studies.

43. Christopher F. Potworowski, *Contemplation and Incarnation: The Theology of Marie Dominique Chenu* (Montreal: McGill Queen University Press, 2001), xi.

44. Chenu, *L’hommage différé au Père Chenu* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 1.

45. O’Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times*, 23.

46. Chenu, *Une école*, 7.

47. Chenu, *Une école*, 8.

48. After the publication of *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, Chenu was forbidden to teach and publish any book or article. One could even say that Chenu, unlike Yves Congar, who was finally rehabilitated and made cardinal at the end of his life, was never officially recognized as one of the most influential French Catholic theologians of our century. The ecclesial hierarchy never forgave his prophetic and daring theological intuitions. The title *L’hommage différé au Père Chenu* summarizes perfectly the legacy of Chenu’s work.

It is important to remark that if many French Dominicans spearheaded the *ressourcement* and *nouvelle théologie*, their approach would soon be scrutinized by the Roman Curia and the headquarters of the Dominican order (Santa Sabina) in Rome. Opponents to the theological and pastoral positions of Chenu and his colleagues (Y. Congar, M. Féret, and L. Charlier) at Le Saulchoir staged a forceful opposition. In France, it was the Dominicans from the Toulouse Province at Saint-Maximin's priory who formulated a response under the title "Sagesse." The document was a direct rebuttal of Chenu's book *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. Three Dominicans led the movement in Rome: Michael Browne, at the time rector of the Angelicum (the university of the Order in Rome) and later master-general and cardinal; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, professor at the Angelicum and Chenu's monograph director in 1920; and Mariano Cordovani, theologian of the Holy Office. These three Roman Dominicans prepared the way for the condemnation of the *nouvelle théologie* and Le Saulchoir's approach in 1950 with the encyclical "Humani Generis." The Second Vatican Council reversed the devastating judgment of Garrigou Lagrange and his comrades-in-arms and ended the Pius epoch (Pius IX to Pius XII) from 1846 to 1952 of the modernist crisis. The Council's texts, *Nuntius ad Universo homines* (The Message to Humanity) and *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution), show clearly that Chenu's call for the Church's engagement with the modern world was taken seriously. See Ulrich Engel, "The Question of Modernity," trans. Bonifatius Hicks, OP, *St. Dominic's Priory*; Brussels, 14/01/2004, 1–9. Antonio Franco, *Marie-Dominique Chenu* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003); de la Brosse, *Le père Chenu*.

49. O'Meara and Philibert, *Scanning the Signs of the Times*, 23.

50. The Index was a list of books and other publications banned by the Vatican because they were regarded as heretical, anticlerical, and contrary to Catholic teachings. The final edition appeared in 1948, and the index was abolished officially in 1966.

51. See Jomier's, Anawati's, and de Beaurecueil's articles in *Hommage*, 58–83. Chenu's famous line "*Islam comme vocation*" became the driving force within and among these friars in Cairo. See "Vocation en 'terre d'Islam,'" Avon, *Les frères*, 311–20.

52. Jean Pierre Jossua, OP, "La mort du Père M. D. Chenu," *Le Monde*, Feb. 13, 1990.

53. Chenu, *L'Hommage différé*, 59.

54. Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 19.

55. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 18.

56. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 18.

57. De Beaurecueil would eventually find his own expression and understanding of "*le mystère de l'Islam dans la providence divine*." Massignon's love affair with Islam through al-Hallāj raised concerns among some Christian orientalists. Even Anawati had some serious reservations about his approach. Massignon's theology of intercession (*badaliyya*), his understanding of the prophethood of Muḥammad, "*le prophète négatif*," and his view of Islam as the fulfillment of God's promise to Ishmaël were not accepted in all Catholic circles. His disciple Youakim Moubarac will be a major support to his ideas. See Avon, *Les frères*, 855–63.

58. See chapter 3 of this book.

59. Avon, *Les frères*, 728. He cites from a letter that de Beaurecueil wrote in Paris in May 2003. Jean Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil's voiced a similar criticism of Gardet and Anawati's books on Islamic mysticism and theology. He felt that both authors were imposing neo-Thomistic categories on Islamic theology and mysticism.

60. First, de Beaurecueil wrote a thesis titled "*L'homme, image de Dieu, selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin*" (June 1944) for a Licentiate in theology. Two years later, he completed his theological studies with an expanded version titled "*L'homme, image de Dieu, selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Études sur l'élaboration et la portée d'une doctrine théologique*" (Le Saulchoir, 1946). In Catholic pontifical seminaries of the time, this latter degree was similar to a doctorate, and the holder could teach theology in Catholic seminaries or pontifical schools.

61. "Founding members: Serge de Beaurecueil," www.IDEO.org.

62. Jean Marie Mérigoux, "Mystique Dominicain: le frère Serge de Beaurecueil," *Sources* (November–December 2005): 288.

63. Avon, *Les frères*, 446.

64. See Chenu, *La parole de Dieu: La foi dans l'intelligence*, vol. 1, and *L'Evangile dans le temps*, vol. 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1964); de la Brosse, *La liberté dans la foi*; and Jacques Duquesne interroge le père Chenu: un théologien en liberté (Paris: Centurion, 1975).

65. See Bernard Montagnes, OP, *The Story of Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange*, trans. Benedict Vivian (Mahwah, NJ: 2006). The author summarizes Lagrange's life:

The story of father Lagrange, founder of the *École biblique* in Jerusalem, is the story of the struggle within the Catholic Church for responsible academic freedom in the tradition of St Thomas. Steeped by faith and utterly devoted to the church, Father Lagrange strove to apply the latest historical-critical method to his biblical studies, to demystify the scriptures, and to make them available to the average Catholic. And yet, the church authorities blocked the publication of his commentaries on the Book of Genesis (excerpt from the jacket). Lagrange was a partisan of the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of Pope Leo XIII, inviting scholars to solve the difficulties created by a rationalistic approach of the Bible through an exegesis that would be at the same time rooted in tradition.

66. "History," www.ebaf.info.

67. J. J. Pérennès, *Antonin Jaussen*.

68. "History," www.ebaf.info.

69. See www.ifao.egnet.net.

70. Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 6.

71. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 117; Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 6; Avon, *Les frères*, 51–53.

72. Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 4; Avon, *Les frères*, 56.

73. Grace Glueck, "The Holy Land Through the Eyes of the Explorers," *New York Times*, August 10, 2001. The article reports on an exposition in New York of archival collections of photographs by the *École biblique* in Jerusalem sponsored by the American Biblical Society. Many of the photographs were taken by A. R. Savignac and A. Jaussen during their study travels in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Sinai, the Negev, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey. See <http://mobia.org/exhibitions/the-holy-land-through-the-eyes-of-explorers#slideshow1>.

74. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 120; Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 10.

75. Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 11.

76. Morelon believes that a number of conflicting issues developed between M. D. Boulanger and A. Jaussen, particularly in terms of the vision assigned to the priory. A. Jaussen insisted on the scientific and academic role of the institution, while M. D. Boulanger opted for a pastoral one.

77. Avon, *Les frères*, 40–45.

78. Years later, Anawati, Jomier, and de Beaurecueil would be the main lecturers of the *Circle Thomiste*. Other eminent scholars, such as L. Massignon and many laymen and -women, also gave lectures.

79. Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 15. See Pérennès, *Le Père Jaussin*, 48.

80. Morelon, "L'IDEO," *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 17; also Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 155; Avon, *Les frères*, 251; and *Historical Data*, www.IDEO.org.

81. At this point, the Dominican formation house had returned to France and been renamed Le Saulchoir d'Etiolles.

82. See www.iblatunis.org.

83. Chenu, "La coexistence culturelle de la civilisation arabe maghrébine et de la civilisation occidentale du Moyen Age," *Confluent* (1961): 6–12.

84. Chenu, "La coexistence culturelle de la civilisation ...," *Confluent* (1961): 6–12.

85. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 123.

86. Avon, “Un homme du magistère catholique devant l’Islam. Le Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884–1972), in D. Pelletier et al., *Mélanges Etienne Fouilloux*, 13. Avon believes that Tisserant’s main concern was the protection and survival of Christian minorities in predominantly Muslim lands. “*Tisserant veut protéger les Chrétiens d’Orient du ‘péril Musulman,’*” in Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 121.

87. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 124.

88. See the first draft of the charter of the IDEO in Moleron, “L’IDEO du Caire,” *Mémoire Dominicaine*, 15, 2.

89. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 124.

90. Avon, *Les frères*, 726.

91. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 127.

92. Mérigoux, “Un mystique dominicain,” 2. Also Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129. See also IDEO, “Bibliographie de Serge de Beaurecueil, O.P.,” in *Les Fondateurs de l’IDEO*, www.IDEO.org.

93. Pérennès describes Yahyā’s relationship with the Dominican friars in Cairo in *Georges Anawati*, 129 and 154–55. While a student at al-Azhar, and at the invitation of Anawati, Yahyā used to spend the last ten days of Ramadan at the Dominican priory in Cairo. On both parts, Yahyā (guest) and Anawati (host) gave a theological account of practices of welcome and hospitality toward the religious other. See Morelon, “Osman Yahyā (1919–1997),” *MIDEO* 24 (2000): 441–47.

94. Mérigoux, “Un mystique dominicain,” 2. Also Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129; de Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 25.

95. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 12; see also Mérigoux, “Un mystique dominicain,” 3.

96. Paul Nwyia, *Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (m. 709/1309) et la naissance de la confrérie shadhilite* (Beyrouth: Dār al-Machreq, 1972).

97. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 25; Avon, *Les frères*, 726. According to Avon, Massignon’s enthusiasm is partially based on an error. He is confusing Anṣārī and his father, A. Mansūr, who was a student of Sharīf Ḥamza ‘Aqīlī in Balkh, where one of the last disciples of al-Ḥallāj lived. Avon cites de Beaurecueil: “c’était tentant d’établir inconsciemment une filiation entre Anṣārī et Ḥallāj” (Lettre de Serge de Beaurecueil, Paris, Mai 2003).

98. Anthony O’Mohony, “Cyprian Rice,” *Mémoire Dominicaine* 15 (2001): 217–25.

99. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129–30. For more on Cyprian Rice, see Anthony O’Mahony, “Cyprian Rice, o.p., L’Islam chi’ite et la mission dominicaine en Perse-Iran, 1933–1934,” trans. Guy Bedouelle, in *Mémoire Dominicaine: Les Dominicains et les mondes musulmans* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 217–25. Here are a few articles written by Cyprian Rice: “Persia,” *Blackfriars* 2, no. 16 (1921): 73–81; “Dominicans in Persia,” *Blackfriars* 12, no. 121 (1931): 73–81; and his book *The Persian Sufi* (London: George Allen and Unwind, 1964). See G. Anawati’s review of the book in *IDEO* 8 (1964): 584.

100. Pierre Nautin (d. 1997) was director of the École Pratique des Hautes Études and well known for his erudite scholarship in patristic literature, particularly on Origen. Nautin stayed at the IDEO while working on the manuscripts of Didymus the Blind (d. c. 398), the great Alexandrian theologian of the early church.

101. Avon, *Les frères*, 727.

102. Pérennès, “Le Cercle thomiste et l’Association des frères sincères (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*),” in *Georges Anawati*, 155–60; “Mary Kahil et la *badaliyya*,” 161–66; and finally “Les Mardis de dār es-Salām, des années bénies,” 166–71. Also, Avon, *Les frères*, “*Ikhwān es-Ṣafā*,” 555–59, “*Dār es-Salām*,” 559–68; and a comprehensive study of “*La badaliyya*,” Massignon, *L’Hospitalité sacrée*, 371–469.

103. Mary Kahil was a remarkable and influential woman. She was born into a rich Greek Catholic family, was a close friend of Massignon, and befriended the friars. Avon speaks tenderly of the tandem Kahil and Massignon as “l’amazone et l’érudit,” *Les frères*, 124. Pérennès writes,

“C’était une grande dame, assez représentative de ces familles grecques-catholiques, qui, tout en étant pétries de culture arabe, savaient rester ouvertes à l’Occident. Georges Anawati et les dominicains d’Abbassiah lui devront beaucoup.” Mary Kahil et la *badaliyya*. Also, Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 161. Jacques Keryell writes an abridged biography of the aristocratic woman in Massignon, *L’Hospitalité sacrée*, 77–132.

104. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 149.
105. Avon, *Les frères*, 728.
106. Avon, *Les frères*, 728. Lettre de Serge de Beaurecueil au Père Avril, 20 juin 1950, K (012), *APF*.
107. Congruent with the priest-worker movement.
108. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129.

Chapter 2

1. Massignon attributed his return to Catholicism to the event of May 1908 in Baghdad when he experienced a “holy hospitality” from the Allusi family and the “visit of the stranger.” He believed that he survived because of the prayers of C. de Foucauld, Hussmann, and M. al-Hallāj.
2. De Beaurecueil would particularly distinguish himself in this matter. See [chapter 3](#).
3. Avon, *Les frères*, 728–29. Avon buys into the dominant and incorrect belief that Hanbalism and Sufism are incompatible.
4. Louis Gardet and Georges Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie Musulmane* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1948), 91–93.
5. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 24.
6. Avon, *Les frères*, 446–45 and 625–30; Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 125–37.
7. Boilot and even Anawati did not oppose de Beaurecueil’s choice to leave the IDEO. No doubt there is an aura surrounding the life and scholarship of Anawati, but little is said about his overbearing personality in the community. It is unfortunate that Pérennès’s biography of Anawati hardly ventures into such aspects and reads like a case for canonization. Even the tandem Jomier and Anawati did not always function harmoniously (my conversations with J. J. Pérennès).
8. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 30.
9. Évariste Lévi-Provençal and Anawati met in Algiers in 1941 and remained friends thereafter. Lévi-Provençal was one of the foremost scholars of Islamic Spain and a member of the CNRS. See a few books by Évariste Lévi-Provençal: *Histoire de l’Espagne musulmane au Xe siècle. Institutions et vie sociale* (Paris: Maisonneuve–Larose, 2002 (reprint); *Histoire de l’Espagne musulmane. Le califat Umayyad de Cordou* (Paris: Maisonneuve–Larose 1999 (reprint); *Séville musulmane au début du XIIe siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve–Larose, 2001).
10. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 31.
11. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 31.
12. Farhādī had a successful career. He was professor at the University of Kabul and later ambassador to the UN. He wrote a short English introduction to Anṣārī’s life and translated de Beaurecueil seminal biography of the master into Persian under the title *Sarguzāsh-i Pir-i Hirāt: Khvāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī* (Kabul: Beyhaqi, 1355/1976).
13. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 30–31.
14. Avon, *Les frères*, 730.
15. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 33.
16. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 34.
17. Avon, *Les frères*, 730. A son retour, il [de Beaurecueil] donne une liste succincte de manuscrits arabes dans le numéro 2 de la *Revue de l’Institut des manuscrits arabes* (novembre 1955). Il réserve au MIDEO la première ébauche de ses fiches descriptives pour plus de 550

manuscrits en arabe, persan, pashto, ourdou et turc (cote de manuscrits, titre et auteur, dimensions, nombre de folios et nombre de lignes par page, date et nom du scribe, papier et écriture, ornementation, état, reliure, et dans le cas des manuscrits arabes, référence éventuelle à Brockelmann).

18. De Beaurecueil published the fruit of this systematic and demanding work on his return in 1956, first as “Manuscrits d’Afghanistan,” *MIDEO* 3 (1956): 75–206, and as a monograph, *Manuscrits d’Afghanistan* (Cairo: IFAO, 1964). See Avon, *Les frères*, 730.

19. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 37.

20. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 38.

21. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 39.

22. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 39.

23. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 39.

24. Ibn Taymiyya was buried in a Sufi cemetery in Damascus, and his grave became a place of pilgrimage for many.

25. Maria Eva Subtelney, “The Cult of ‘Abdullah Anṣārī under the Timurids,” in *God Is Beautiful and Loves Beauty. Festschrift in Honour of Annemarie Schimmel*, ed. Alma Giese and J. C. Burgel (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1992), 387.

26. Subtelney, “The Cult of ‘Abdullah Anṣārī under the Timurids,” in *God Is Beautiful and Loves Beauty*, 381.

27. Lisa Golombeck, *The Timurid Shrine at Gazur Gah* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1969).

28. See Denis Gril, “Espace sacre et spiritualité, trois approches: Massignon, Corbin, Guenon,” in *D’Un Orient à l’autre*, vol. 2—Identifications (Paris: CNRS, 1999).

29. Patrick Laude, *Louis Massignon. The Vow and the Oath*, trans. Edin Q. Lohja (London: The Matheson Trust, 2011), 3.

30. Laude, *Louis Massignon*, 2.

31. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 40.

32. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 40.

33. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 44.

34. See Dominique-Jacques Boilot’s letter to the French Provincial on behalf of de Beaurecueil, “Des conditions très exceptionnelles se trouvent réalisées qui permettent un témoignage d’une rare qualité dans un pays où le christianisme n’est représenté que par quelques étrangers non implantés” (Lettre du 27 octobre, 1962, AIDEO).

35. De Beaurecueil recalls his joy: “Le troisième dimanche de l’Avent, je signais un contrat. ... moi j’avais envie de danser,” in *Mes enfants*, 44.

36. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 44.

37. Mérigoux, “Un mystique Dominicain,” 287. Ultimately, de Beaurecueil returned to Kabul in 1963 and lived there for twenty years.

38. Victor Danner and Wheeler Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ Illāh: The Book of Wisdom; Abdullāh Anṣārī: Intimate Conversations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 168. See also de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 24.

39. *The Poems of Gerard M. Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Garner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 67.

40. al-Dhahabī (d. 1348), *Siyar a’lām al-nubalā’* (The Biographies of the Great and Prominent People); Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī’s (d. 1393), *Dhayl ‘alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilā* (Appendices to the Generations of Ḥanbalītes); and ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 1492), *Nafahāt al-‘Uṣūl* (The Breezes of Intimacy). Subtelbny adds ‘Abdullah al-Ḥusainī Asīl al- Dīn Vaiz, *Maqṣad al-iqbāl-i sultaniyyah*, to the list of sources. Maria Eva Subtelney, “The Cult of ‘Abdullah Ansārī under the Timurids,” in *God Is Beautiful and He Loves Beauty: Festschrift Für Annemarie Schimmel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 377–405.

41. Jawid A Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sūfīsm: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from Sulamī to Jāmī* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 200), 69; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 15.
42. The Pīr of Herāt's most famous Persian book is the *Munājāt*, and the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* is his revered Arabic book.
43. The two full-scale books devoted to the Ghaznavids are Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), and *The Later Ghaznavids: Splendor and Decay* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984). See also his articles "Early Sources," *The IQ*, 3–22, where he catalogs the major literary and historical sources for the reigns of Sebüktigin, Maḥmūd, Muḥammad, and Maṣ‘ūd (977–1041). Also, Spuler, *EI*, 2nd ed., 1050–53. The Ghaznavids conquered and ruled Khurāsān from 999 to 1040 and Afghanistan until 1187. The Saljūqs defeated the Ghaznavids by 1041 and became the new rulers of Khurāsān.
44. Qāsim Ghanī, translated by Dabashi, "Persian Sūfīsm during the Saljūq Period," in *The Heritage of Sūfīsm: Classical Persian Sūfīsm from Its Origins to Rumi*, vol. 1, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 141.
45. Dabashi, "Persian Sūfīsm during the Saljūq Period," in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 143.
46. Frietz Meier, "Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū'l Khayr," *EI*, 2nd ed., 377–80; Terry Graham, "Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū'l Khayr," in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 83–136.
47. See the translation of his seminal book *Principles of Sūfīsm*, trans. B. R. von Schlegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1992); *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle*, trans. Alexander Knysh (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2007); see Qushayrī in Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 150–53; Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sūfi Commentaries on the Qur’ān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 71–72; Knysh, *E.Q.*, no. 5, 143–46.
48. *Kashf al-mahjūb*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Accord, NY: Pir Publications, 1999); Bowering, *EI*, 2nd ed., 429–30.
49. The Persian treatises are *Kashf al-mahjūb* by Ḥujwīrī and *Munājāt* by Anṣārī.
50. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sūfīsm: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 123.
51. Karamustafa, *Sūfīsm*, 122–24.
52. Translation by de Beaurecueil, in *Khwādja*, 23, from Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, ed. Guy Le Strange (Leiden: Brill, 1915), 152.
53. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 6; de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 11.
54. Alas, recent violence and bombings have marred its charm and archeological treasures.
55. Goharshād was the celebrated wife of the Timurid emperor Shāhrukh Mīrzā (d. 1447).
56. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 168.
57. See "Herāt," *EI*, 2nd ed., 177–78; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 19–20.
58. Jürgen Paul, "The Histories of Herāt," *Iranian Studies* 33, nos. 1/2 (2000): 98–99.
59. Paul, "The Histories of Herāt," *Iranian Studies*, 104.
60. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 168.
61. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 170.
62. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 4.
63. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 19.
64. See appendix for Anṣārī's shrine in Herāt.
65. Angha, *An Annotated*, "Childhood," 25–29; "Youth and Education," 29–20; "Teachers," 30–35; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 23; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 4–5.
66. Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 15; Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 4.
67. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 4.
68. Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 26.
69. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 168.

[70.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 12.

[71.](#) See his biography in Anṣārī's Persian *Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, trans. Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 54.

[72.](#) Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 176–77; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 25–26. Neither Jāmī nor de Beaurecueil indicates the date of the death of these Ṣūfī masters, and I could not find them either.

[73.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 35; *Cris*, 12.

[74.](#) Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 6; Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; Karamustafa, *Sūfism*, 95.

[75.](#) De Beaurecueil, Anṣārī, *Chemin de Dieu* (Paris: Sindbad, 1988), 27.

[76.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 27.

[77.](#) Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 8; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 29.

[78.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 29.

[79.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 30.

[80.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 31.

[81.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 31.

[82.](#) dDe Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 14.

[83.](#) Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, 124; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 41.

[84.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 41.

[85.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 38.

[86.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 40.

[87.](#) Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 7.

[88.](#) Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, trans. Thackston, in Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 169.

[89.](#) Quoted in Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 6.

[90.](#) Makdisi, *Religion*, 120.

[91.](#) There four schools of jurisprudence (madhab) in Sunni Islam are Hanafi, Maliki, Shāfi‘ī, and Hanbali.

[92.](#) De Beaurecueil, *khwādja*, 43,

[93.](#) *Şad maydān: The Hundred Fields*, trans. Munir Aḥmad Mughal (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1983), 18.

[94.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 16.

[95.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 48; *Chemin*, 17.

[96.](#) The dates of death of traditionalist scholars who met Anṣārī during his first study travel are recollected in Jāmī, *Nafahāt*; Dhahabī, *Siyar*; Subkī, *Tabaqāt*; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt*. These were de Beaurecueil's sources in *Khwādja*, 46–51. Most of the sources failed to mention their dates of death, and the author believes that the dates were likely unknown.

[97.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 50.

[98.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 46, 56, and 62.

[99.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 58.

[100.](#) Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 18–19; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 62.

[101.](#) In her translation of Kharaqānī's utterances, Christiane Tortel remarks that Kharaqānī was under the spiritual tutelage of Abū'l-'Abbās Qaṣṣāb 'Āmulī; see *Parole d'un Soufi: Abu'l -Hasan Kharaqānī* (352–425/960–1033), trans. Christiane Tortel (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 8. See also "La notice sur le Shaykh Abū'l -'Abbās al-Qaṣṣāb al-'Āmulī," 232–36.

[102.](#) Nicholson, *Studies*, 42–44; Angha, *An Annotated*, 35–39.

[103.](#) Kharaqānī, trans. Tortel, 7–13.

[104.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 20; de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 14. The meeting between Anṣārī and Kharaqānī is similar to the fateful encounter centuries later between Jalāl al-din Rūmī (d. 1273) and Shams al-din Tabrīzī.

[105.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 20; *Cris*, 14.

[106.](#) Angha, *An Annotated*, 35.

[107.](#) Schimmel, *Mystical*, 90.

108. Karamustafa, *Sūfīsm*, 94. Kharaqānī’s counsel is reminiscent of al-Hallāj’s (and many other Sūfi masters’) concept of the spiritual hajj.
109. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 13.
110. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’illāh*, 172.
111. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 20.
112. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’illāh*, 172.
113. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 15.
114. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 125.
115. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 8; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 25.
116. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 25.
117. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 90.
118. Angha, *An Annotated*, 40. Verse 165 seemed to have been the kernel of his meditation. Faithfulness to the book of God and the example of the Messenger of God guided his thought and teaching.
119. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27.
120. Angha, *An Annotated*, 41–43; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27.
121. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27.
122. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 94.
123. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 9; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27. The *Munājāt* is particularly loved by ordinary people as well as poets and educated men and women alike.
124. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 29; Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 9.
125. Angha, *An Annotated*, 43; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 106–7; and *Chemin*, 29.
126. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 21.
127. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 10; Angha, *An Annotated*, 44.
128. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 134.
129. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 112.
130. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 10; de Beaurecueil, *EI*, 2nd ed., 515; and *Khwādja*, 120–23. He gives short biographies of the master’s major disciples. Mughal also gives a list of twelve names who were the pupils of the master. In *Ṣad maydān*, 18.
131. See his tomb and shrine, table 1.
132. De Beaurecueil, *EI*, 2nd ed., 515.
133. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 146.
134. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 148.
135. See Karamustafa, *Sūfīsm*, 94; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 28; *Knowledge of God in Classical Sūfīsm*, trans. John Renard (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 294; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’illāh*, 165.
136. See de Beaurecueil’s article “‘Abdullāh Ansārī” in *EIr*.
137. Farhādī, *Sarguzasht-i Pir-i Hirāt: Khvāja ‘Abdullāh Ansārī*.
138. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 144.

Chapter 3

1. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin de Dieu* and *Cris du Coeur*, are cases in point.
2. Marcel Bataillon, “Louis Massignon, professeur au Collège de France,” *Lettres Françaises*, no. Spécial, 15.
3. Claude Geffré, “Le Coran, une parole de Dieu différente,” *Lumière et Vie*, no. 163, 21–32.
4. *Manāzil al-sā’irīn* was written in Arabic, while *Ṣad maydān* was in Persian.

5. See a good overview of Anṣārī's corpus in Angha, *An Annotated*, 23–52; Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 17–117; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 172–310.

6. Angha, *An Annotated*, 45.

7. De Beaurecueil, "Présentation d'Anṣārī," *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 291–300.

8. On two important occasions, first in 1963, the 900th lunar anniversary of the master's death, and second in 1977, on the lunar millennium of his birthday, de Beaurecueil did a review of the scholarship on Anṣārī at each occasion with the names of scholars in Western, Arabic and Persian worlds, and publications on the master's life and spiritual thought. See de Beaurecueil, "Le neuvième centenaire lunaire de la mort de Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī Harawi," *MIDEO* 7 (1963): 219–40; and "Le millénaire lunaire de la naissance de Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī Harawi (396 H.)," *MIDEO* 13 (1977): 305–14.

9. Ḥujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, trans. Nicholson; *Qushayrī's Epistle*, trans. Knysh.

10. Quoted in Angha, *An Annotated*, 53, from Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī, *Isālat-i Ṣad maydān*, 142. Angha notes that Pūrjavādī and Mullā'i have written extensively on Anṣārī in Persian. Unfortunately, the author does not read Persian and thereby did not have access to this rich literature.

11. A. G. Ravān Farhādī, "The Hundred Grounds of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī," in *The Heritage of Sufism: Classical Persian Sufism from its Origin to Rumi*, vol. 1, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 381–99.

Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 387.

12. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 47–55, also Munghal, *Ṣad maydān*, 13–14.

13. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 40.

14. See Ibn al-Qayyim's *Madārij al-sālikīn*.

15. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 164. He lists *al-Arba 'ūn fī dalā' il al-tawḥīd*; *al-Arba 'ūn fī l-sunna*; *Dhamm al-Kālam wa ahlih*; *al-Farūq fī l-ṣifāt*; *'Ilal al-maqāmāt*; *Kanz al-sālikīn yā zād al-'ārifīn**; *Kitāb al-qadariyya*; *Kitāb al-qawā'id*; *Manāqib ahl al-āthār*; *Manāqib al-imām Ahmad*; *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*; *Mokhtaṣar fī ʿādāb al-Ṣūfiyya wa l-sālikīn li-ṭarīq al-ḥaqqa*; *Muṇājāt*; *Naṣīḥat-ē Khwāja nizām al-mulk**; *Qaṣīda nūniyya*; *Ṣad maydān*; *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*; and *Takfir al-jahmiyya*. Works marked with * are in Dari-Persian, the rest in Arabic.

16. Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 21–23; de Beaurecueil's articles "al-Anṣārī," in *EI*, 2nd ed., and "'Abdullāh Anṣārī," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

17. The following authors are all in agreement: de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 137; Angha, *An Annotated*; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 175; and Bo Utas, "The Muṇājāt or Ilāhi-Nāmah of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 3 (1998): 83.

18. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 120.

19. Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 19.

20. Utas, "The Muṇājāt," 83.

21. Utas, "The Muṇājāt," 83; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 137. He notes, "L'ouvrage était terminé en l'an 475/1082–1083, date d'un exemplaire portant authentification et signature de la main même d'Anṣārī." Ijaza is a permission or an authorization that indicates one is qualified to transmit text or teach a subject in Islamic sciences.

22. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 137; *Chemin*, 39. Concerning the *Manāzil*, de Beaurecueil reports that after the last exile of the master in 1087, he sent a copy of the treatise to his young novice Abū 'l-Najm Miṣbāh in Balkh. The problem is that the manuscript of Herāt and that of Balkh are not entirely identical. There are a number of discrepancies, and there is no consensus about which manuscript is more authentic. See de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 142.

23. Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 19. He writes: "Most of his works that are available to us are based on the notes of students and novices, notes which he rarely checked or edited (including the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*)."

24. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 15–17.

25. See Helmut Ritter, “Philologica III,” *Der Islam* 22, 89–100.

26. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 20.

27. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 20; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 4.

28. Angha, *An Annotated*, 45. Karamustafa in *Şūfīsm*.

29. Edited and translated by de Beaurecueil, “Un opuscule de Kwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī concernant les bienseances des Soufis,” *BIFAO* 49 (Paris: 1960): 203–40. Also de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 310–15.

30. Fritz Meier, *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 55. According to Angha, Pūrjavādī follows Meier’s leads in this issue. She cites Naṣrollah Pūrjavādī, *Isālat-i Ṣad maydān*. See Angha, *An Annotated*, 45.

31. Gerhard Böwering, “The Adab Literature of Classical Şūfīsm: Anṣārī’s Code of Conduct,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf, 70. Karamustafa remarks that *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Şūfiyya* or *Ādāb al-murīdīn* is probably the work of a disciple of Anṣārī, but falsely attributed to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Şūfīsm*, 86. De Beaurecueil has always attributed *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Şūfiyya* to the master. Nowhere does it express any doubt. Also see *Ādāb al-murīdīn (A Şūfi Rule for Novices)*, trans. Menahem Milson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Mirjan Molé, “Les Kubrāwiya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècle de l’Hégire,” *REI* (1961): 61–142.

32. Keeler follows ‘Ali Aşghar Hikmat’s study in *Kashf al-asrār*, known as *tafsīr* of *khwāja Abdu’llāh Anṣārī*, which found that *Kashf al-asrār* was Maybūdī’s commentary based on Anṣārī’s work. Keeler writes, “*Kashf al-asrār* is based upon and embodies the only surviving text of the mystical commentary on the Qur’ān by the well known Ḥanbalī Şūfi, ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī of Herāt,” in *Şūfi Hermeneutics: The Qur’ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20. This book is from *Persian Şūfīsm and Exegesis: Maybūdī’s Commentary on the Qur’ān The Kashf al-asrār* (PhD diss., Cambridge University, Faculty of Oriental Studies, 2001). Also see Keeler’s articles: “Exegesis iii. In Persian,” and “Maybūdī, Abū'l-Fażl Rashīd-al-Dīn,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

33. Utas, “The *Munājāt*,” 84; also see Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 27.

34. De Beaurecueil, “Le millénaire lunaire de la naissance de Khwāja ‘Abdullah Anṣārī Harawi,” *MIDEO* 13 (1977): 314.

35. According to Farhādī, *Kashf al-asrār* was dictated in Dari-Persian, but Angha differs with Farhādī. She offers a perceptive remark on the language issue about Persian dialects. She notes: “*Ṣad maydān* is written in the Heri dialect [herāti] that sprang from the Pahlavi language, itself an offspring of Old Persian. The present Persian language is one of the dialects of Old Persian, the language spoken over two thousand years ago in the Persian Empire that extended from east of the present-day Iraq to Punjab and west India. The Pahlavi language had two different dialects: the northern Pahlavi (common to Khurāsān and Azerbaijan), and the southern Pahlavi (common in Farsi, central Persia). The southern dialect became a common language in Persia during the Sāsānian Empire. There were (still are) other dialects in Persia, such as Farsi, Dari, Kurdi, and Heri. Heri was mainly spoken in Herāt and is the dialect used in *Ṣad maydān*, and Dari originated from Pahlavi language and was common during the Sāsānian period, especially in the Khurāsān. Her footnote on the development of the Persian language and its dialects is based on Muḥammad Taqī Bahār’s *Sabkshināsi* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1380/2001), vol. 2, i–iv). See also Angha, *An Annotated*, 53–54.

36. Vladimir Ivanov, “Ṭabaqāt of Anṣārī in the Old Language of Herāt,” *JRAS* (1923): 1–34; 337–82; and Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 70.

37. The writer follows Farhādī’s transliteration and translation. See his article in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 387.

38. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 59; Angha, *An Annotated*, 55–56; and de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 37.

39. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 37–38.
40. De Beaurecueil, “Une ébauche persane des *Manāzil as-sā’irīn*: le “Kitāb-e-Şad Maydān,” *Mélanges Islamologiques* 2 (1954): 3–4.
41. MFAO: *Mélanges de l’Institut Francais d’Archeologie*.
42. “*Anṣārīyyāt*: ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī al-Harawi (396–481/1006–1089). Les étapes des itinérants vers Dieu,” *BIFAO*, 1–181. The introduction of this translation deals with the following: *Relevé et description des manuscrits*; *Les chaînes de transmission*; *La tradition manuscrite et les commentaires*; *Manuscrits composites*; *Prototypes et familles de manuscrits*; *Essai d’une histoire de la tradition textuelle*. It is an erudite work that is the fruit of seventeen years of research at the IDEO in Cairo.
43. Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 125; Avon, *Les frères*, 446.
44. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 172–315 (part II).
45. Ritter compiled a bibliography of the master in “Philologika VIII/1: Anṣārī Herewī-Senā’ī Gaznewī,” *Der Islam* 22/2, 89–100. See also de Beaurecueil, Presentation d’Anṣārī, *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 291–300.
46. De Beaurecueil, *Manuscrits d’Afghanistan* (Cairo: IFAO, 1964). See also *MIDEO* 3 (1956): 75–206.
47. De Beaurecueil, *Manuscrits*, vii–xiii.
48. Karamustafa, *Šūfīsm*, 84–87. The author offers a list of major Šūfī manuals and bibliographical compilations from the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries. To name but a few: Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj’s (d. 988) *Kitāb alluma ‘fi’l-taṣawwuf* (The Book of the Light Flashes), Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī’s (d. 990s) *al-Ta‘arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (Introduction to the Way of the People of Šūfīsm), and Abū Nu‘aym al-İsfahānī’s (d. 1038) *Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-asfiyā’* (The Ornament of God’s Friends and Generations of the Pure Ones). This list is relevant to our study because these treatises are contemporary to Anṣārī. In addition to Karamustafa’s list, *Risalāt nahj al-khāṣṣ* (Path of the Elects) by Abū Maṇṣūr al-İsfahānī (d. 1107) directly influenced the Pīr of Herāt. A century later, *Ādāb al-murīdīn* (The Etiquettes of Disciples) by Ahmād al-Ghazālī (d. 1126) is also a seminal work in this area.
49. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 53; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 53; see also de Beaurecueil’s edition of *Risāla nahj al-khāṣṣ*, in de Beaurecueil, “La voie du privilégié; petit traité d’Abū Maṇṣūr al-İsfahānī,” *Mélanges Taha Hussein*, Cairo, 1962, 46–76.
50. Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds,” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 391–92; and Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 53; de Beaurecueil, “La voie du privilégié; petit traité d’Abū Maṇṣūr al-İsfahānī,” in *Mélanges Taha Hussein*, 46–76.
51. Also included in his Persian *Ṭabaqāt al-Šūfiyya*, de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 264–65.
52. See the preface of *Şad maydān* and *Manāzil*, de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 83–85 and 153–58.
53. According to Angha, *Muruwwa* literary means “manliness” but may also be rendered as “being just and fair, having compassion, being benevolent.” For Anṣārī, *muruwwa* is living and standing for oneself and one’s convictions. Like the Q.3:18 commands: “... and those with knowledge to stand firm for justice ...” *An Annotated*, 68. See also Seyyed Hossein Naṣr, “The Rise and Development of Persian Šūfīsm,” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 1–18. In this article, Naṣr reviews major aspects of early Persian Šūfīsm and gives succinct explanations of concepts such as *shāḥ* (theophanic locutions or ecstatic sayings), ethics, divine love, chivalry, and so forth. See, in the same collection, Muḥammad Ja‘far Mahjūb, “Chivalry and Early Persian Šūfīsm,” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 549–82. Chivalry (*futuwwa*) according to Naṣr “is best translated as ‘spiritual chivalry,’ ” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 9. According to Nurbakhsh, *futuwwa* means “putting others before oneself in this world and the hereafter,” in *Šūfī Symbolism*, vol. X, 90. In his introduction to *The Heritage*, he writes, spiritual chivalry means “the performance of altruistic service to others while remaining free of any self-consciousness with respect to the value of the service,” xxxii.

54. *Şad maydān*, trans. Mughal, 18. On that note, Farhādī seems unimpressed by Mughal's translation and raises major objections regarding its "accuracy and fidelity to the Persian original." Farhādī, in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 387, footnote 13.

55. De Beaurecueil, "Les Références bibliques de l'itinéraire spirituel chez 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (Ve/XIe siècle), *MIDEO* 1 (1954): 9–38.

56. De Beaurecueil's translation in *Chemin*, 156–57.

57. Angha, *An Annotated*, 45.

58. De Beaurecueil, "Présentation d'Anṣārī" *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 295. On this note, Laoust, Makdisi, Massignon, Bell, and Hurvitz are in agreement with Angha and de Beaurecueil concerning Hanbalī spirituality.

59. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 41.

60. Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 10.

61. In his article "La structure du Livre des Étapes," *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 80–91; and *Chemin*, 47–55, de Beaurecueil scrutinizes the work of twelve commentators of the *Manāzil*. We comment on the commentators later, but suffice it to say for the moment that Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, on one hand, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, on the other, are good examples of each school. Even though Ibn Qayyim does not agree with the structure and organization of the stations, his voluminous work *Madārij al-sālikīn* is a rearrangement of and commentary on the master's *Manāzil*. De Beaurecueil's comment on Ibn Qayyim's interpretation is worth mentioning: "Seul Ibn Qayyim critique, à tort ou à raison mais en tout cas avec courage. Comme il le dit lui-même quelque part dans son gros commentaire, s'il aime beaucoup Anṣārī, il aime davantage encore la vérité." See also Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 93–98. De Beaurecueil writes about *Manāzil*, "La réussite de l'œuvre se manifeste par l'abondance des commentateurs qui s'attachèrent par la suite à en mettre en lumière les moindres détails. *Ittiḥādiyya et Shuhūdiyya* se la disputèrent et se réclamèrent du maître qui l'avait écrite. Dans l'état actuel des connaissances bibliographiques, on connaît dix-huit commentaires du *Manāzil*, dont deux seulement, de tendances opposées, ont été publiés jusqu'ici, ceux de Kāshānī et d'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. See de Beaurecueil, "Une ébauche persane, 1–27.

62. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 40; Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 60; Angha, *An Annotated*, 146. Nubādhān is located near Herāt and is now called Nawbādām.

63. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, "Les journées de Nobādhān," 71–76. The experience of Nubādhān is reported in Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-uns*, 218–19 and the master's *Tabaqāt al-Sūfiyya*, 205–6. In his biography, de Beaurecueil narrates this incident. In the middle of the winter of 1034, Anṣārī was invited to a Sūfi gathering in Nubādhān, where a good number of Sūfi Shaykh, well advanced in spiritual exercises, convened for *samā'*. Anṣārī mesmerized his peers and the audience by his rhetorical genius and spiritual insights. The participants engaged in *samā'*, and the master followed along with the crowd. He got carried out, lost control, and fell into a trance. After this episode, the master was so distraught that he left the vicinity immediately, abandoned all the gifts he had received, and headed to Herāt with his old prayer mat. Following the incident, he abandoned *samā'* and discouraged his disciples to take part. After this experience of intoxication, he opted for the sober path.

64. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 100; and *Chemin*, 40–41.

65. As de Beaurecueil notes, "Anṣārī parlera de chapitres, montrant qu'il s'agit bien simplement d'un *ordo expositioni*." *Chemin*, 47.

66. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi*, vol. 8, 90.

67. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 41.

68. Angha, *An Annotated*, 64.

69. De Beaurecueil's translation, in *Chemin*, 84. Angha's translation is found on 147. Most Sūfi manuals describe the major stations (*maqāmāt*), dwellings (*manāzil*), and states (*ahwāl* or *ḥālāt*).

Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, trans. Nicholson, 18; Qushayrī's *Risāla*, trans. Knysh, 77–78; Ritter notes that “the states of the soul which come over mystics when they are seeking God are manifold, and the halting-stations they must traverse are great in number.” *The Ocean*, trans. O’Kane, 341. See also Ian Netton, “The Breath of Felicity: *Adab, aḥwāl, Maqāmāt* and Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī,” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 457–83.

70. De Beaurecueil, “Une ébauche persane,” 1–27; *Chemin*, 37–39; Angha, *An Annotated*, 67–72 and 99–145.

71. Angha, *An Annotated*, 68. In chapter 4, “Key Concepts in Ḫad̄ maydān, A Comparative Study,” she delves into a comparison of Ḫad̄ maydān, the *Munājāt*; *Kashf al-asrār*, 95–145.

72. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 45–46.

73. Angha, *An Annotated*, 78.

74. Angha, *An Annotated*, 78; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 47.

75. Angha *An Annotated*, 78; *samā'* means audition and listening. Javad Nurbakhsh in *Ṣūfī Symbolism*, vol. 2 (London: Khāniqāh-i Nimatullāhi Publications, 1984), 189. Nurbakhsh describes *samā'* as “the realization and discovery of mystical states which is necessarily accompanied by the loss of the faculties of retention and judgment in one’s internal consciousness.” *Da’wā* literally means pretense or false claim. In Ṣūfīsm, the term refers to all forms of heedless spiritual pretense and self-delusion. *Ahl-i da’wā* refers to those who claim falsely to possess any spiritual insights. Also, *EI*, 2nd ed. *Samā'*, *Da’wā*, and *tahqīq*; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin* (three types of wayfarers), 41.

76. Angha, *An Annotated*, 79.

77. Angha, *An Annotated*, 80.

78. Quoted by de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 46.

79. Quoted by de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 47.

80. Quoted by Angha, *An Annotated*, 46 (from Mullā’i, *Majmu‘a*, 128).

81. Angha, *An Annotated*, 9. Anṣārī himself wrote in the tradition of *saj'*, a literary style used by poets before and after him. Muṣliḥu al-dīn Sā‘dī’s (d. 1295) masterpiece, *Gulistān* is the example that Farhādī points out as the reference text in the *saj'* style. See *The Gulistān (Rose Garden) of Sā‘dī: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Bethesda, MD: IBEX Publishers, 2008).

82. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 38.

83. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 38.

84. Utas, “The Munājāt,” 83. Also, de Beaurecueil, “Une ébauche persane,” 10.

85. Angha, *An Annotated*, “Inconsistencies in the classification,” 89.

86. Angha, *An Annotated*, 89.

87. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 45.

88. Angha, *An Annotated*, 89.

89. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 75.

90. Angha, *An Annotated*, 68–72. She presents a parallel between Ḫad̄ maydān and *Manāzil*.

91. Angha, *An Annotated*, 68–72, and chapter 4, “Key Concepts in Ḫad̄ maydān, A Comparative Study,” 95.

92. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 81; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 283–86.

93. Quoted by de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 154.

94. See for example, *ittihādiyya*, *shuhūdiyya*, and *wujūdiyya* in John A. Subhan, *Ṣūfīsm: Its Saints and Shrines* (Toronto: Indigo Books, 2002), 52; Reza Pirbhai, *Reconsidering Islam in a South Asia Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 59–62; and R. W. J. Austin, *Ibn ‘Arabī: The Bezels of Wisdom* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980).

95. Caspar, “Muslim Mysticism,” *Studies*, ed. M. L. Swartz, 179.

96. De Beaurecueil, “La structure du livre des étapes,” *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 90–91. Farhādī makes a similar remark: “The spelling out of each subject in three items, as well as the exposition of the entire matter in 10 x 10 chapters, is meant only as *aide-mémoire*, and not intended to be

mathematically concretized.” “The Hundred Grounds of Abdullāh Anṣārī,” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 388.

97. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 154.

98. Angha, *An Annotated*, 58. According to the author, the Saljūk vizier Niẓām al-Mulk’s endowment of schools and scholarships to teachers produced a profusion of spiritual writings, such as *Nūr al-‘ulūm* by Abū Ḥasan Kharaqānī; *Kashf al-mahjūb* by Ḥujwīrī; *Asrār al-tawḥīd* by Muḥammad ibn Munawwar; Qushayrī’s *Risāla*; and Anṣārī’s *Ṣad maydān*.

99. See the masterful paper of Devin J Stewart, “*Saj’* in the ‘Qurān’: Prosody and Structure,” *Journal of the Arabic Literature* 21, no. 2 (Sep. 1990): 101–39.

100. Angha, *An Annotated*, 61.

101. Angha, *An Annotated*, 59. Also, parts of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth are also written in *saj’* style.

102. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 176.

103. Devin Steward, *Saj’* in the Qur’ān: Prosody and Structure,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21 (1990): 101–39.

104. Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds,” in Lewisohn, *The Heritage*, 387.

105. Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds,” 387.

106. Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds,” 389. The author goes further and adds that the first technique is the master’s preferred style, found also in *Dhamm al-Kalām*, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, *Kashf al-asrār*. In this regard, Anṣārī followed a style found in the sayings of Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī l’Khayr (d. 1049). Ibn Munawwar’s *asrār al-tawḥīd* and parts of Ḥujwīrī’s *Kashf al-mahjūb* follow a similar technique. A later treatise composed after Anṣārī, Aḥmad Ghazālī’s (d. 1126) *Sawāniḥ*, falls under this category. Farhādī asserts that the second technique is especially the popular *mathnawi*’s metric form. He cites Sanā’ī’s *Ḥadīqa*, Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār’s (d. 1221) *Illāhi-nāma*, and *Mantiq al-ṭayr*, and of course Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s encyclopedic *Matnawī*. They all exemplify this genre. Finally, in *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*, the ternary system is fully utilized. The master’s ideas and teachings are arranged in ternate form, or in sets of three. The author points to earlier didactic works to show that this tripartite division of subjects for mnemonic purpose has many precedents. He cites Ḥakīm Maysarī’s *Dānish-nāma*. On this note, Farhādī and de Beaurecueil believe that the most influential work on Anṣārī’s thought was Abū Manṣūr Isfahānī’s (d. 1027) *Risāla-yi nahj al-khāṣṣ*.

107. Angha, *An Annotated*, 149; Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 63; *Ṣad Maidan*, *Hundred Fields between Man and God*, trans. Munir Aḥmad Mughal (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1983).

108. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 69. See also Angha, *An Annotated*, 149; *Ṣad Maidan*, trans. Mughal, 150; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 147.

109. Angha, *An Annotated*, 145. On this front, it is important to add that if de Beaurecueil did not go as far as to declare Persian languages the most suitable locus for divine revelation like Massignon had done for Semitic languages, he was fond of the intelligence of Anṣārī and his ability to render deep and seminal thought in vernacular with such beauty.

110. See *The Gulistān of Shaykh Muṣliḥu dīn Sādī of Shīrāz*, ed. John Platts (London: W. H. Allan and Co., 1871). See footnote 475 for Thackston’s translation.

111. See Gavin Pecken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Work of al-Muḥāsibi* (London: Routledge, 2010); *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Ṣūfism*, trans. Alexander Knysh; Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl at-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980).

112. De Beaurecueil named his house of hospitality for Afghan street children, *La maison d’Abraham*. See Massignon’s marvelous *Les trois prières d’Abraham* (Paris: Cerf, 1997) and *L’hospitalité sacrée* (Paris: Nouvelle Cite, 1987).

113. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 161.

114. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 115.

115. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 175.
116. Keeler, *Sūfi*, 249.
117. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 175.
118. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 28.
119. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 161. With regret, he recalls that the main radio station in Kabul used to broadcast excerpts of the *Munājāt* daily a few years ago.
120. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, xiv.
121. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 120.
122. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 165.
123. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, xiii.
124. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, xiv.
125. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 26.
126. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 178. In addition to de Beaurecueil’s French translation, *Cris du Coeur*, there are the following English ones: Sardar Sir Jogendra Singh, *The Invocations of Sheikh ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt, A.D. 1005–1090*; Arthur Arberry, “Anṣārī’s Prayers and Councils,” *Islamic Culture*, no. 10, 369–89; *Munājāt: The Intimate Prayers of Khwāja ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī*, trans. Lawrence Morris and Rustam Sarfeh (New York: Khanegha and Maktab of Maleknia Naseralishah, 1975).
127. Utas, “The Munājāt,” 87.
128. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 175.
129. Edward FitzGerald’s *ruba‘iyāt of Omar Khayyam* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1899) and J. T. P. de Bruijn’s *Of Piety and Poetry: The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Hakīm Sana‘i of Ghazna* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 113–118. Many classical mystical writings attributed to seminal Sūfi masters share a similar problem of authenticity.
130. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 175; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 288.
131. Utas, “The Munājāt,” 84–85. Bo Utas, Thackston, and de Beaurecueil agree that the *Munājāt* have been printed and edited many times and under different titles.
132. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 287; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 175.
133. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 116.
134. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 178.
135. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 115.
136. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 176.
137. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 29.
138. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 25–41.
139. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 41–42.
140. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 42.
141. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 43–63.
142. De Beaurecueil, “La souffrance, mère de la joie?,” *Vie Spirituelle*, no. 697 (décembre 1991): 485–97.
143. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 120–21; de Beaurecueil, *Cris* 72, no. 13. In our view, the master is echoing the Qur’ānic line that speaks of God being closer to human than their jugular vein.
144. Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 125. The French translation is found in de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, no. 28, 78.
145. Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 182.
146. Caspar, “Muslim Mysticism,” *Studies*, ed. M. L. Swartz, 179.

Chapter 4

1. The very priory where he fell in love with the Dominican life at the age of fourteen (see chapter 1).

2. Michel de Certeau uses the same phrase with a different meaning. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

3. De Beaurecueil, “À propos d’une stèle brisée,” in *L’Herne: Louis Massignon*, ed. J. F. Six, 419.

4. De Beaurecueil, “Être fidèle à quoi?,” in *Je crois*, 35–37.

5. De Beaurecueil, *L’Herne*, ed. J. F. Six, 419.

6. De Foucauld was very influential on Massignon, and for a long time, Foucauld hoped to see Massignon join him in Tamanrasset. See also Annie de Jésus, *Charles de Foucauld: sur les pas de Jésus de Nazareth* (Paris: Karthala, 2002); René Voillaume, *Seeds of the Desert*, trans. Willard Hill (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1964); Marguerite Catillon du Perron, *Charles de Foucauld* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

7. Anṣārī’s corpus does not deal with the concept of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) as understood in Islamic theology. Prophethood and prophetic action in this chapter are best described by the following Christian and Jewish scholars: Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 2001); Walter Brueggemann’s *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); John Dear’s *Jesus the Rebel* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Sheed & Ward, 2000) and *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009); Gustavo Gutierrez’s *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983); Michael H. Crosby, *Can Religious Be Prophetic?* (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2005). As Crosby writes, “Authentic prophecy flows from the mystical experience; the mystical experience is empty without its proclamation in prophecy” (15). De Beaurecueil’s life journey and writings are congruent with these Christian writers’ understanding of prophetology, and differ from the concept of *nubuwwa* in Islamic tradition. To be certain, prophethood in this chapter signifies servanthood in the sense of caring for the most vulnerable in a given community: Kabul street children.

8. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 91.

9. Homily, Feast of St. Bartholomew. Quoted by Pascaline Coff, OSB. “Man, Monk, Mystic,” accessed September 22, 2010, www.bedegriffiths.com.

10. Sandra Schneiders is a member of the religious order “Immaculate Heart of Mary” and has written a three-volume work titled *Religious Life in a New Millennium*. Also, the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) published a five-part essay titled “Religious Life as a Prophetic Life Form.” In these articles and interviews, Schneiders describes Jesus as a prophet and remarks that the call and task of prophetic action are found in those who choose to live a prophetic religious life. These articles ran from January 4–8, 2010, on the NCR website. Other articles on NCR’s website were posted on February 27, 2009; August 17, 2009; September, 11, 2009; and December 9, 2009. Schneiders, “What Jesus Taught Us about His Prophetic Ministry,” NCR, January 6, 2010.

11. Schneiders, NCR, January 4, 2010.

12. Schneiders, NCR, January 6, 2010.

13. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 49–50.

14. Schneiders, NCR, January 4, 2010.

15. 16. See David N. Power, OMI, “Priesthood in Christian Tradition,” 1–48 (to be published in the NCE) and Aelred Cody, OSB, “Priest and High Priest,” in *Oxford Companion to Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

17. There are seminal books extremely useful to understanding the renewal of religious life proposed by Vatican II: Karl Rahner’s *The Religious Life* (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1999); Johannes Metz’s *Followers of Christ: The Religious Life and the Church* (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1999); Jean Marie Roger Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde: le projet des religieux* (Paris: Cerf, 1974); and M. H. Crosby’s *Can Religious Life Be Prophetic?*

18. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 57.

[19.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 35–36.

[20.](#) Unlike de Beaurecueil, de Foucauld maintained his ties with the French colonial army and government, which would lead to his assassination. But both embraced the Catholic fulfillment theory at different levels. Islam is at best a “preparation ground” for Christian message.

[21.](#) ‘Ali Merad, *Christian Hermit in Islamic World. A Muslim View of Charles de Foucauld*, trans. Zoe Hersov (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 3.

[22.](#) Dominique Casajus, *Charles de Foucauld, moine et savant* (Paris: CNRS, 2009) (cover jacket). The author’s critical reading of de Foucauld is an important corrective to the hagiographical tendencies found in many biographies. He pays much attention to how most authors have demonized the Tuaregs and elevated de Foucauld to a mythical figure. He brings a serious historical approach to the hermit of Hoggar’s life.

[23.](#) Casajus, “Charles de Foucauld face au Touaregs,” *Revue d’ethnologie d’Europe*, 8.

[24.](#) The full title of the book is *Christian Hermit in Islamic World. A Muslim View of Charles de Foucauld*, trans. Zoe Hersov (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

[25.](#) See Antoine Chatelard, *La mort de Charles de Foucauld* (Paris: Karthala, 2000) and Josette Fournier, *Charles de Foucauld: amitiés croisées* (Paris: Cheminements, 2007).

[26.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 44–45.

[27.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 45.

[28.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 8.

[29.](#) Voillaume, *Seeds*, 6.

[30.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Prêtre des non-Chrétiens* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 11.

[31.](#) See “The mystery of Nazareth in the life of Brother Charles of Jesus,” in Voillaume, *Seeds*, 13–23.

[32.](#) Ellsberg, “Charles de Foucauld,” in *Martyrs*, ed. Susan Bergman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 297.

[33.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 100.

[34.](#) Ellsberg, *Charles de Foucauld: Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 68.

[35.](#) Voillaume, *Seeds*, 121.

[36.](#) Ellsberg, *Charles de Foucauld*, 54.

[37.](#) Quoted by Ellsberg “Charles de Foucauld,” in *Martyrs*, 89.

[38.](#) Mgr. Charles Martial Allemard-Lavigerie, “*L’Armée et la mission de la France en Afrique*.” A speech given on April 25, 1875, in Algiers Cathedral, “Algiers, A. Journal,” 64. Quoted also in Merad, *Christian*, 79. It is important to note that Ernest Renan’s popular yet controversial book, *La vie de Jésus* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974 [first published in 1863]), enraged many Catholics and other Christians of his time.

[39.](#) D. Casajus, “Charles de Foucauld a-t-il été un pionnier du dialogue islamo-chrétien?,” In *Écrivains et intellectuels français face au monde arabe*, ed. Catherine Mayaux (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011), 209–18.

[40.](#) De Foucauld’s letter to Mgr. Guerin, July 4, 1904. Quoted in Casajus, “Charles de Foucauld face au Touaregs,” *Revue d’ethnologie d’Europe*, 5; also Merad, *Christian*, 82.

[41.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 41

[42.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 41.

[43.](#) Questions about the authenticity of the Prophet of Islam are as old as Islam itself. Concerning Christian scholars’ views, Massignon’s concept of “le prophète négatif” would deeply problematize the debates and sharpen the opposition. His disciple Youakim Moubarak (d. 1995) would defend this minority position and face the objections of many Catholic and close friends of Massignon. See Avon, *Les frères*, 601–3.

[44.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 43.

[45.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 74.

[46.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 73,

[47.](#) Dominique Casajus, “Charles de Foucauld a-t-il été un pionnier du dialogue islamochrétien?, in *Ecrivains et intellectuels français au monde arabe*, ed. Catherine Mayaux (2011), 209–18.

[48.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Prêtre*, 9–10.

[49.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 42.

[50.](#) Sevenaer, “Prière (*salāt*) et invocation (*du’ā*) entre Islam et Christianisme,” *Journées Romaines*, 2005; biblio.domini.org; and *Chrétiens*. See also *Lumen Gentium*.

[51.](#) See R. L. Moreau’s article “La badaliyya” in Massignon, *L’hospitalité sacrée*, 387–99.

[52.](#) Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 161. Avon, *Les frères*, 124.

[53.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 67. See table 4, de Beaurecueil at prayer in his chapel.

[54.](#) Interfaith prayer session everywhere raises the same uncomfortable questions. This conundrum has no answer in our view.

[55.](#) Merad, *Christian*, 83.

[56.](#) De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 57–69. On the distinction between the reign of God and the church and the relationship between the historical Jesus and the universal Christ of faith, see Geffré, *De Babel*, 68–70; Dupuis, *Towards*, 330–58; and *Jesus Christ and the Encounter of World Religions*, trans. Robert A. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 178–207.

[57.](#) See David Power, “Priesthood in Christian Tradition.”

[58.](#) Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* (Beyreuth: Dar-el-Machreq, 1970), 52–56.

[59.](#) The Sunna and particularly Ḥadīth literature as an authoritative source are not part of our discussion in that section.

[60.](#) Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christian: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–9. Her entire book focuses on the Qur’ānic treatment of Christians in tafsīr literature. McAuliffe deals mainly with such Christian themes as “Nazarenes of faith and actions” and the “followers of the Qur’ānic Jesus.” She shows that “the praiseworthy amity of Christians” should not be invoked indiscriminately. The Qur’ānic commentators through the ages have understood them to refer to a limited number of Christians. See McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic*, 204–39; Ayoub, *A Muslim*, 73–78 and 187–208. Also see his article “Muslim Views of Christianity: Some Modern Examples,” *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984): 49–70. Other works on Muslim views of Christianity include Hugh Goddard, *Muslims Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1996); Simon Wood, “The Criticisms of Christians and the Arguments of Islam: An Annotated Translation of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā’s *Shubahāt al-Naṣārā wā ḥujaj al-Islam*,” PhD diss., Temple University, May 2004. The monograph is published as *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proof: Rashīd Riḍā’s Modernist Defense of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008); and finally Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformist and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Rashīd Riḍā and His Associates* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). The book is a thorough study of Rashīd Riḍā’s polemic writings and his associates in his famous journal *al-Manār*. The author focuses on the dynamic of Muslim understanding of Christianity during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[61.](#) From M. Williams Pickthal’s *Glorious Qur’ān*:

Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud. (*al-Mā’ida*, vol. 82)

They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no god save Him. Be He glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)! (*al-Tawba*, vol. 31)

O ye who believe! Lo! many of the (Jewish) rabbis and the (Christian) monks devour the wealth of mankind wantonly and debar (men) from the way of Allah. They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah, unto them give tidings (O Muḥammad) of a painful doom. (*al-Tawba*, vol. 34)

Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. But monasticism they invented—We ordained it not for them —only seeking Allah’s pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance. So We give those of them who believe their reward, but many of them are evil-livers. (*al-Hadīd*, vol. 27)

⁶² Abdelmajid Charfi, “Christianity in the Qur’ān commentary of Tabarī,” *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): 105–48; Maurice Borrmans, “Le commentaire du Manār à propos du verset coranique sur l’amitié des musulmans pour les Chrétiens,” *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975): 71–86; Jacques Jomier, *Le commentaire coranique du manār* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1954), especially the chapter “Le commentaire coranique du manār en face du Jadaïsme et du Christianisme, le devoir de Prosélytisme,” 301–37.

⁶³ See Abū Bakr al Ṣiddīq’s instruction to Yazīd ibn Abū Sufyān before the conquest of Syria in Nasreddin Lebatelier, *Ibn Taymiyya: Le statut des moines* (Beyrouth: El-Safīna 1997), 13. (Nasreddin Lebatelier is Y. Michot’s nom de plume in this pamphlet.)

⁶⁴ Ayoub, “Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict,” *MW* 79, no 1 (January 1989): 31.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Ayoub, “Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict,” 31. (The italics in the Ḥādīth are mine.) Tor Andrea makes a similar argument and points to the influence of Christian monasticism on early Ṣūfīsm. He refers to the testimony of a leader of the Nestorian Church in the year 650. “These Arabs do not only avoid fighting Christianity, they even endorse our religion, and they honour our priests and holy men and donate gifts to monasteries and churches.” *In the Garden of Myrtles*, trans. Birgitta Sharpe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 8. In his book *Muhammad and the Believers*, Fred Donner cites the same Nestorian patriarch Isho‘yahb III in Iraq writing in 647/648 about the new rulers’ amity with Christian monks (114). He argues that the early believers’ movement was ecumenical (if we accept the anachronism), and pious Jews and Christians were included among the “Qur’ānic monotheists” (“Ecumenism” [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010], 68–74). To be clear, the relation between Muslims and Christian monks has not always been good, and too many tragic episodes mark their history.

⁶⁶ Lebatelier, *Le statut*, 9–13. Lebatelier scrutinizes the classical Islamic history to show the complexity and diversity of opinions on Islamic views of Christian monasticism. He refers to Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwā on monasticism and speaks of the fundamental anticlericalism of Islam and his Prophet, concluding that “*La véritable rahbāniyya, c’est en somme l’Islam, la soumission de soi au Très-Haut, dans la paix et la sérénité de l’âme et du corps que seul procure la mise en correspondance de sa volonté avec celle de Dieu, telle que révélée dans le Coran et idéalement illustrée par Muḥammad, c’est-à-dire l’effort constant, la lutte sur Son chemin, al-jihad fi sabīl Allāh.*” Lebatelier, *Le statut*, 12.

⁶⁷ Zoe Hersov used “refined form of tyranny” and “glorious parasites” to describe Shaykhs who exploit their disciples and lord it over them in her “Translator’s Afterword” in Merad, *Christian*, 85.

⁶⁸ Apart from Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil had a great admiration for Rūmī, and for a little while he hesitated between the Pīr of Herāt and Rūmī. See his biography at www.ideo.org.

⁶⁹ See Rahimi’s documentary movie *Nous avons*.

⁷⁰ Merad, *Christian*, 85.

⁷¹ De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 58.

72. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 110–11. Etienne Gill and Simone Bailleau-Lajoinie were the most memorable friends of his Kabul adventure.

73. De Beaurecueil, *Prêtre*, 12.

74. See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (1972; reprint, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

75. The titles he chose for his articles are very telling, for example: “Des lacets verts!” (Green Shoelaces), “Emerveillement et rigolade” (wonder and laughter), “Entrons dans la danse” (Let us enter the dance), or “Tais toi! Et que resplendisse sa Lumière” (Keep quiet and the light shine). All these articles are collected in his posthumous book *Je crois*.

76. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 89.

77. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 98.

78. Etienne Gill lived with de Beaurecueil in the same apartment complex from 1969 to 1972, then for two years across the street from his house, and for four more years in the same vicinity. Very few people could speak about de Beaurecueil’s daily life with as much authority and sincerity as Gill does.

79. Several documents of Vatican II sought to achieve similar goals.

80. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 77–80.

81. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ was professor of geology at the Catholic Institute in Paris, director of the National Geologic Survey of China, and director of the National Research Center of France. He died in New York City in 1955. Many consider de Chardin to be a pioneering figure in modern Catholic theology and one of the most brilliant theologians who tried to bridge the divide between science and religion. The Jesuit priest, however, was criticized by the Roman Curia and his own order for his avant-garde thought. As a result, he was ordered by the Jesuit General Vladimir Ledochowski to leave his teaching position in France in 1925, and some of his works were denied publication during his lifetime. In 1950, Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani generis* condemned many of Teilhard’s positions, and in 1962, a decree from the Roman Curia denounced his works. Among his most popular books are *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007); *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny (New York: Image Books, 2004); and *Hymn on the Universe* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972). De Beaurecueil explicitly refers to Teilhard’s Mass on the universe and Ernest Wiechert’s *Missa sine nomine* as “*Eucharistie transfigurante*,” in *Je crois*, 79.

82. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 14; and *Mes enfants*, 63.

83. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 64–65.

84. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 16.

85. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 14.

86. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 103–4.

87. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 21.

88. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 77.

89. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 78.

90. See de Beaurecueil, *Chronique I, II, III*, ed. E. Gill and S. Heslot.

91. Pérennès, “*Colloque Abbaye de Sylvanès, October, 2009*,” 3.

92. The civil war in Algeria provides two perfect examples: the murder of seven monks from the Monastery of Notre-Dame de l’Atlas in Tibehirine in March 1996 and the assassination of the bishop of Oran, Pierre Claverie, in August 1996. See Pérennès’s biography, *Pierre Claverie: un Algérien par alliance* (Paris: Cerf, 2000), and Michot’s *Le statut du moine*. There are of course, many other similar cases around the world within or outside a Muslim community.

93. Lettre d’Afghanistan, July 23, 1983. *Chronique III*, ed. E. Gill and S. Heslot, 158.

94. The BBC report on September 7, 2010, “The Sexually Abused Dancing Boys of Afghanistan,” is a chilly reminder of what could have happened to any of these boys who ended up at the *Maison d’Abraham*. See <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11217772>.

95. De Beaurecueil, *Chronique III*, ed. Gill and Heslot, 159–60; Rahimi, *Nous avons*.
96. See <http://www.afghanistan-demain.org/>.
97. De Beaurecueil and his children, table 5.
98. www.Afghanistan-demain.org; also “Postface à la nouvelle édition,” *Mes enfants*, 219–23.
99. See de Beaurecueil and his children, table 5.
100. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 16.
101. In 1946, he completed a pontifical doctorate in theology and a licentiate in letters. In February 1971, he received a *Doctorat d’État* at the Sorbonne for his works on Anṣārī.
102. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 147.
103. Duprée, “Serge de Beaurecueil,” *South Asia Series*, 6.
104. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 211.
105. Gill, “*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*,” 2.
106. Rahimi, *Nous avons* (chapter 3).
107. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 69.
108. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 72–79 (Mirdād’s story).
109. De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 79.
110. Christian Duquoc, *L’unique Christ. La symphonie différée* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 255.
111. Sandra Schneiders, *New Wine-Skins* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 2–3.
112. De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 8.
113. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 19.

Conclusion

1. <http://picture-poems.com/rilke/>, accessed November 23, 2010.
2. Michael Himes, *Doing Truth in Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 83.
3. Quoted in Himes, *Doing the Truth*, 84.
4. Quoted in Himes, *Doing the Truth*, 84.
5. He was called, among other things, “*Un fou de Dieu parmi les Musulmans*.”
6. William Ernest Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 511.
7. See the biographies of three Dominicans: Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and Catherine of Siena, who embodied these mystical and prophetic elements. Richard Woods, *Mysticism and Prophecy: The Dominican Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).
8. Woods, *Mysticism*, 25. The classical reference is “For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others what has been contemplated than merely to contemplate.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 188. For more on Dominican spirituality, see Anselm Townsend, *Dominican Spirituality* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1934); Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life* (Rockford, IL: TAN-Books, 1977); Benedict Ashley, *The Dominicans* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990); *Thomas Aquinas: The Gifts of the Spirit: Selected Spiritual Writings*, ed. Benedict Ashley, trans. Matthew Rzeczkowski (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996); Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991).
9. Mahmoud Ayoub and Thomas Michel, in their respective books, *A Muslin View of Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007) and *A Christian View of Islam* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), give readers a full treatment of the theological incompatibilities, the mystical affinities, and pastoral possibilities and examples of the complexities and opportunities of Muslim-Christian relations and lived experiences. They present an accurate view of what it means to live a Christian discipleship among Muslims or vice versa.

10. Duquoc, “Défis de l’islam au christianisme,” accessed November 30, 2010, <http://biblio.domuni.eu/articlesreligions/journéesromaines/islam-01.htm>.
11. David Burrell, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in a World Gone Religiously Awry,” *MW* 100 (2010): 414–30.
12. Morelon pays homage to the two mystics in these terms: “Serge de Beaurecueil (1917–2005) and ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī (1006–1089): deux mystiques: une belle connivence.” *MIDEO* 27 (2008): 4.
13. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (BookSurge, 2003), 2, accessed September 20, 2010, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/tagore/gitnjali.htm>.
14. Georg Wilhelm Frederich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 397.
15. Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm’Irāqī, *Divine Flashes: The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).
16. T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 16.
17. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
18. Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2006), vii–ix. Eric Geoffrey shares Shah-Kazemi’s belief in the sense that for him the esoteric or spiritual aspect of Islam is the heart without which Islam withers. He believes that the Western secularized and globalized world is in dire need of a soul, and the Muslim world must recover its genuine spiritual dimensions. The mystical dimensions of Islam and other faith traditions could provide a soul, or in secular terms could humanize our globalized world torn apart by religious strife and gross economic disparities. See *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh: la sagesse des maîtres Ṣūfīs*, trans. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Grasset, 1998); Colloque international organisé par Eric Geoffroy (Département d’Arabe—UMB la Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie (Egypte) du 18 au 21 Avril 2003).
19. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 24.
20. Woods, *Mysticism*, 25.
21. Massignon, *The Passion*, trans. Herbert Mason, xv. See also Marie Louise Guge, *Louis Massignon: Crucible of Compassion* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997). 112.
22. Preface to de Beaurecueil, *Je crois*. 9.
23. In the introduction, I argue that his childhood memories alone do not fully explain his entire dedication to children’s dire situation.
24. Pérennès, “*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*,” 7.
25. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, t. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 76. De Beaurecueil repeats the same lines in his interview with Ratiq Rahimi in the documentary *Nous avons partagé*.
26. Pérennès, “*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*,” 7.
27. De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 131–32.
28. Tor Andrea, *In the Garden*, 4.

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